Chronicles

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Chronicles
A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE

Vol. 15, No. 9 September 1991

On 'Edmund Burke'

Certainly an article on Edmund Burke by Conor Cruise O'Brien is sufficient provocation to justify almost any mayhem on the part of a distinguished scholar of Burke. But Mr. Stanlis has allowed himself to be lured too far in his review of that article for *Chronicles* (Vital Signs, May 1991), into an argument against John Locke resulting from O'Brien's misunderstanding of both Burke and Locke.

The argument is misdirected by two curious difficulties for a Burke scholar —failure to consider sufficiently the historical context, and being overly influenced by the modern liberal interpretation of Locke. Twentieth-century liberals such as George Sabine, embarrassed at having no important nonsocialist theorist for their cause, have sought to picture John Locke, who wrote half of his work on religious themes and was a practicing Anglican —and whom the modern historian Sidney Ahlstrom has called a "defender of the faith"—as a Cartesian, social democratic rationalist. But it just does not fit, no matter how hard disciples like O'Brien have tried.

The liberal Locke caricature was so worn by the 50's that Leo Strauss could only rescue it by creating the fantasy of what he slyly called Locke's "partial" law of nature. For it is extremely difficult not to recognize that Locke was a believing Christian who accepted revelation as well as reason and science. More important, by attacking Locke in this manner, Strauss criticizes both Locke and Burke for what Mr. Stanlis calls philosophical dualism.

Those who are misled by the clear writings of Locke upon religious subjects rest their defense, as Mr. Stanlis ultimately does, on the fact that Locke had orthodox critics in the Anglican church, and that liberal deists tended to like Locke. Yet the explanation for both was simple: Locke was, in fact, a libertarian Christian who believed in toleration. So were many other Christians whose credentials few would question, such as Lord Baltimore, Charles Carrol of Carrolton, or Lord Acton.

It is true that Locke had a minimal definition of what had to be believed to be a Christian. That is because he supported both a state church and toleration. If citizens were required to belong to or at least support an English state church (as Roman Catholics would not), toleration would require that church members be forced to submit to a minimum of doctrinal beliefs. That minimum—that Jesus Christ was Lord and Saviour and that his commands were to be followed—is based upon Jesus' Last Supper statement ("Eternal life is this: to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent") and is not a bad minimum if one is looking for such.

Why did Voltaire like Locke? Yes, he probably did think Locke's message of freedom would destroy Christianity. But Locke thought Christianity was hardier, and it has been. Mr. Stanlis emphasizes that "unlike Locke, Burke accepted the Church of England just as it was." But that is the point. The Church of England was more tolerant in Burke's time than it was in Locke's, partially due to Locke's influence. It still held the faith, but it had stopped beheading dissenting Englishmen.

Mr. Stanlis makes much of the fact that Locke did not tolerate Catholicism. But a non-Catholic king would not be accepted as head of the church —and nontoleration clearly was the only politic position for Anglicans who desired to keep their heads to take. By Burke's time toleration was relatively safe. Even a Catholic like myself finds it difficult to argue that a believing Anglican should be required to be a martyr for Rome in order to be called a Christian.

Stanlis's argument becomes pathbreaking when he claims that "Locke approved the Revolution of 1688 not

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on constitutional grounds, but out of religious bigotry against Catholics." The charge of monomaniacal anti-Popery against the epitome of English common sense, John Locke, is hard to make. Although Locke was concerned about the foreign influences of Popery and was obviously dependent upon his anti-Catholic sponsor, Lord Shaftesbury, this by no means proves anti-Popery was his primary justification for his views on the most important event of his lifetime.

As proof, Mr. Stanlis argues that the myth of Locke's constitutionalism "endured for 266 years, until Peter Laslett shattered it in 1956 in his superb edition of Locke's two treatises." Well, Laslett makes an excellent case that Locke wrote most (not all) of his work then, but Laslett does not attribute Locke's motivation to anti-Catholicism. On this matter, Laslett is ambiguous: "We do not know whether he [Locke] 'believed in' the Popish Plot anymore than we know if Shaftesbury did, but he never criticized Shaftesbury's actions at any time." Few servants criticize their masters and, as Laslett notes, Locke is especially circumspect about anyone, be he high or low. On the central question, Laslett is clear: "Even in this, to us his earliest [writings], Locke is revealed as a constitutionalist, and a man convinced of the distinction between secular and spiritual power."

Mr. Stanlis's claim that Locke and Burke are not in the same tradition is harder to answer. But I will stand with F.A. Hayek and say that Locke and Burke stand in the same British empirical and moral tradition—of course differing in that they faced different problems during their lifetimes.

Mr. Stanlis places Burke in the natural law tradition and Locke outside because he misreads Sterling Lamprecht, who was recognized as the authoritative Locke scholar until modern times. Lamprecht is quoted to show that Locke "stood so close to the deists that he has sometimes been classified as one of their number." But Lamprecht's actual point was that those who so classified Locke were mistaken. According to Lamprecht, "The tradition which seems to have had the most outstanding effect upon Locke's ethical philosophy was that which based morality upon the 'law of nature.' This tradition was very old and widespread. It sprang from the teachings of the Roman stoics, dominated the thought of the medieval scholastics and then found striking expression in several great moralists of the seventeenth century."

This is the tradition that united Locke and Burke, and it is the same one that has energized the British and American cultures and that modern conservatism at its best still conserves today.

—Donald Devine
Washington, DC

It is unfortunate in the extreme that Peter Stanlis must resort to a caricature of Locke in order to rescue Burke from the seemingly Rousseauian O'Brien. The religious marriage of Locke and Voltaire may be provocative, but it betrays a mind unfamiliar with the religious currents of the 17th century and their impact on political thought and action. While some may find interest in reducing political thought to its lowest common denominator, as in finding the roots of Locke in the Levellers (not to mention the Diggers, with whom O'Brien seems to identify and from whom Stanlis does not distinguish), this does not make Locke any less a Christian, much less a Voltairian deist, unless, of course, one is either a High Churchman or a tridentine Roman Catholic, in which case the positions of the Presbyterians, Harrington, Milton, Sydney *et al.* are no different for purposes of judgment. Nor can one forget that Locke lived and wrote in an age when religious intolerance still found expression in political action. Locke, with his Arminian flavor, hardly appealed to the likes of Calvinist John Edwards and perhaps with reason, but historians will be hard pressed to find any essay of Voltaire's favoring Christianity, much less a sympathetic one that cites the historicity of Christ without denying His divinity. John Locke's final days were spent defending his Christianity. Voltaire's were spent attacking it.

More to the point, how does Stanlis square his view of Locke with that of, say, G.H. Sabine, who ties Locke to Hooker in a "long tradition of medieval political thought, back to St. Thomas, in which the reality of moral restraints on power, the responsibility of rulers to the community which they ruled, and the subordination of government to law were axiomatic"? Surely this makes a better foundation for explaining Locke's incongruities, while saving his relationship with Burke and serving to parry a view that identifies him with Jacobinism.

Locke, a precursor of Toland and Tindal? Maybe. An influence on Voltaire and Burke? Definitely. But to divorce him from Burke in the arena of government, much less marry him to Voltaire in the arena of religion, serves no purpose but to disclose a prejudice sharpened by animosity, a prejudice not unlike that which both he and Voltaire sought to frustrate and discourage —the one by sustaining the separation of Church and State, the other by separating the two; the one by accommodating Christianity, the other by destroying it.

—Gordon D. Payne
Verona, WI

Mr. Stanlis Replies:

My two critics not only disagree with me regarding Locke's politics and religion, but also with each other. Mr. Payne appeals to George Sabine to justify his liberal interpretation of Locke, and thereby criticizes me for writing "a caricature of Locke." Mr. Devine objects that I was "overly influenced by the modern liberal interpretation of Locke" by the likes of Sabine and Conor Cruise O'Brien, which Payne accepts. I agree with Devine that the common wisdom that perceives Locke as a shiny-bright liberal political philosopher is indeed a caricature of the historical Locke; it is an idealized abstraction wholly shorn of all the sordid conspiracies and underground revolutionary activities he engaged in during more than a decade before 1688. Payne ignores this and accepts at face value Locke's propaganda, pitched to create a public illusion of social and political respectability. In short, Payne is still engulfed in what Maurice Cranston calls "the myth of Locke's political innocence." This myth, consciously cultivated by our secular liberals, is the result either of ignorance or a conspiracy of silence to suppress the historical Locke.

Neither of my critics mentions Richard Ashcraft's *Revolutionary Politics*

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and Locke's Two Treatises of Government (1986), nor the excellent scholarship of Mark Goldie on "The Roots of True Whiggism" and "John Locke and Anglican Royalism." From original manuscripts by Locke in the Bodleian Library, Ashcraft describes Locke's exclusionist revolutionary activities and close associations with old Commonwealth radicals in their prosecution of the Popish Plot, the Monmouth Rebellion, and the Rye House plot to murder King Charles II and the Duke of York. Ashcraft presents "the historical evidence for the view that Locke's political theory is much more clearly linked with the ideas of the Civil War radicals than we have been taught to believe." He notes that in courting the populace, "Locke invariably presses his argument as a hard-line radical." Ashcraft proves to the hilt Laslett's observation that Locke "went much further toward revolution and treason than his earlier biographers knew, anxious as they were to present him as a man of unspotted personal and political virtue." The same applies to Locke's theory of property ownership. He praises the "honest industry" of the dispossessed and condemns "the idle, unproductive, and Court-dominated property owners" as undeserving of their property, thus throwing out legal prescription in favor of utility based upon labor. Ashcraft observes: "It seems strange that this rather radical endorsement of the claims of labor over those of land ownership has been so little commented upon by those who are eager to award Locke the honor of having formulated the modern defense of the private ownership of property. . . . Locke was not advocating the return of the Diggers, though his attitude toward property is not so far removed from theirs as is generally assumed."

Before Payne accepts Sabine, "who ties Locke to Hooker," he should read Peter Munz's *The Place of Hooker in the History of Thought* (1952). After four pages of comparisons of similarities and differences between Hooker and Locke, Munz concludes: "Hooker would have been unable to understand the reasoning of Locke." The reverse is also true. Unlike Payne, I take seriously statements about Locke's religion made by his closest associates. Robert Ferguson, one of Locke's colleagues in subversive revolution, recorded that Locke's patron, Shaftesbury, attributed to Locke his own Socinian religious beliefs. Like the good Anglican Socinian that he was, Locke never denied, nor did he affirm, the divinity of Christ, so that as an extreme minimalist in doctrine he remained one point removed from Unitarianism and a world apart from orthodox traditional Christianity.

Following Lamprecht, Devine asserts that Locke's appeals to moral natural law places him in the same tradition as the Roman Stoics and medieval Schoolmen. This colossal error is well contradicted by Munz: "The fundamental and far-reaching difference between Hooker and Locke is reflected in their theories of natural law." Devine agrees with me that Burke is in the tradition in which he places Locke, and this forms the basis of his linking Locke with Burke, even including Locke's empiricism. While the empirical element in Burke's politics (probably derived in part from Montesquieu) is rooted in the facts of history, simultaneously it is connected with the moral norms of natural law through his providential view of history. In sharp contrast, Locke's empiricism rejects or neglects history in favor of immediate sensory impressions backed by ideological theory based upon private discursive reasoning and logic of the kind that Michael Oakeshott condemned as "rationalism in politics." To Locke, medieval Christianity was a tissue of vile superstitions, whereas Burke revered its achievements. Locke's philosophical orientation is not in the tradition of the Stoics and medieval Christianity, regarding natural law, but in Newtonian 17th-century science and speculative philosophy. As William Hazlitt demonstrated in "Mr. Locke a Great Plagiarist," (*Works*, Vol. 20), Locke at once condemned Hobbes as "an exploded writer," and rejected Descartes's innate ideas. Yet he expropriated all of his basic philosophical principles from these and similar writers, such as Malbranche and Spinoza. As John W. Yolton has shown in *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (1983), Locke wholly accepted and only slightly modified Hobbes's materialism and mechanistic conception of human nature. In Britain and France, throughout the 18th century, Locke was the acknowledged fountainhead of the materialist philosophy. The materialism of Anthony Collins in *Discourse on Free Thinking* (1713), that of Joseph Priestley, La Mettrie's *L'Homme Machine* (1748), D'Holbach's atheism, and many others, all drew from Locke's "thinking matter."

Locke's materialism is wholly at variance with the orthodox Christian conception of human nature, which includes soul or spirit, and which is necessary for a valid normative comprehension of natural law. Like Hobbes, Locke used the traditional language of natural law, but largely emptied it of its normative content in favor of a sensory perceived "nature" as a descriptive process in a Newtonian universe, applied to man in society. His conception of "reason" was the private discursive logic of each individual, not the "right reason" (*ratio recta*) of Cicero, the Stoics, Medieval scholastics, Hooker, and Burke. The latter three found the moral norms of natural law embodied in the Justinian Code and common law, in the corporate nature of man in Church and State, and in constitutional law. In contrast, like Hobbes, Locke had an atomistic and hedonistic conception of man, derived from a fictional "state of nature," in which each isolated individual possessed "natural rights" centered in his will and desire to survive. To overcome the anarchy of a state of nature Locke, like Descartes and Hobbes, attempted to place ethics on a mathematical basis. If Mr. Devine wishes to rid himself of the illusion that Locke is in the political tradition of Burke, let him read Caroline Robbins's *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealth* (1959), and then read copiously in the replies to Burke's *Reflections* by Locke's revolutionary "natural rights" disciples.

Devine states that Locke "believed in toleration." Payne is closer to the truth: "Locke lived and wrote in an age when religious intolerance still found expression in political action." This is a descriptive historical fact, but it hardly justifies persecution. Some contemporaries of Locke, including John Dryden, condemned all persecution. Locke's total toleration for Protestants and intolerance for Catholics makes him a perfect exemplar of what Acton describes in "The Protestant Theory of

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Persecution." Devine errs saying that Locke "supported both a state church and toleration" *because* he was a minimalist in Christianity. Burke was no minimalist, yet supported the Church of England, attacked the casuistry of persecution, and was genuinely tolerant. The differences between Burke and Locke on toleration are religious and philosophical, not historical. Devine's claim that Anglicans had to persecute Catholics because they were not obliged to be martyrs for Rome is what Acton calls "the principle of aggressive intolerance." Ironically, Burke, a Protestant, in his attacks on the penal laws against Catholics in Ireland, rejected the Protestant theory of persecution, whereas Devine, a contemporary Catholic, accepts it.

On 'Rodney King'

Clyde Wilson's article (Cultural Revolutions, July 1991) on the L.A. police video was gratefully received. First, because it was the only one that didn't drip with tears big as horse apples over the poor "victim," and second, because my youngest son is a police officer (as was my grandfather, for thirty years).

The media is quick to publicize bruises on burglars but has little to say about blood on cops. I guess it's OK to pummel the police. Sure looks like it after viewing TV news reports of police attempts to control riots and protesters.

But, regarding the L.A. incident, it's the parole board's fault. If they hadn't been so quick to send that guy back on the street, he could have been safely watching TV in the prison lounge.

—*George Savage*
Aledo, TX

On the 'Persian Gulf War'

As Theodore Pappas pointed out (Cultural Revolutions, June 1991), David Brinkley celebrated the Persian Gulf war by saying that "World War II is no longer America's 'last great war.'" Brinkley thereby gave conservatives cause to wonder about those two wars, the idea being what makes a liberal glad always winds up making conservatives sad.

That is a 20th-century reality. On the issue of war conservatives part company with liberals. World War II was the liberals' war. Although Hitler was the enemy who galvanized the West, removing him was less than a victory. Since when does a nation fight a war like World War II to learn that one of its allies was on a par with or worse than the enemy? The answer: since the "new world order" has charmed world leaders out of their senses.

The Persian Gulf War, a U.N. war, was a step toward Armageddon. It has left that area in utter chaos and is a warning to Moslems that they have been singled out to receive the treatment that shapes populations to fit the "new world order." A just war is one a nation fights in the name of self-defense or in defense of the moral order.

—*Frank Broussard*
Opelousas, LA

On the 'Conservative Movement'

As is discussed in the May issue, many of the people now called conservatives have never been conservatives. The left has managed to label anyone who is not a radical as a conservative. The Republican liberals like Bush have gone along with it because of the new popularity of the term, a result of the work of real conservatives plus the failure of liberal policies. The idea that the Republican Party has become an organ of conservatism is due to that hypocrisy and wishful thinking on the part of some conservatives.

The fact is that we do have a real conservative movement with a few strong leaders, but we are a long way from taking over one of the major parties. The majority of Republicans are middle-of-the-roaders and liberals. Most Democrats are radicals (those in office), but there are a few real conservatives still in that fold, too. Check the voting record of, for instance, Ralph Hall from Smith County, Texas.

I don't believe that any real conservatives have been led off the track by George Bush. Realistic politicians will accept the endorsement of the President when it is offered, but they will not sell their souls for it. Those Washington conservatives you speak of are pretenders and should not be mislabeled. Real conservatives never had any confidence in them to start with.

—*Dan Walters*
Fletcher, NC

Samuel Francis's thought-provoking essay "Beautiful Losers" (May 1991) calls for "a new, radical Middle American Right," but someone has already beaten him to it. It is . . . hold on tight now . . . David Duke! Even though I cannot support Duke because I don't trust him, his ideas and his words and general behavior "under fire" from his detractors (who are legion) certainly meet the standards outlined by Mr. Francis. Duke is loathed by the liberals, feared by blacks, and has caused the establishment folk to outdo each other in rushing to denounce him. His KKK past is always mentioned in the same breath with his name; if only Teddy of Chappaquiddick were so treated.

Yet Duke is not afraid to say some things that Middle American conservatives know "in their bones" are wrong: affirmative action, the welfare state, sensitivity, politically correct behavior, gay rights, womens' lib, abortion on demand, homosexual clergy, taxes, etc.

If you can find a candidate more "acceptable," David Duke has already tested the water for him, so to speak, and found that there is a rousing reception in Middle America for his message.

—*J.D. Calhoun*
Ruston, LA

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"POLITICALLY CORRECT" is this year's catch phrase, and before Christmas it will be as stale as the new miniskirt or yesterday's George Will. Always willing to outdo themselves in gullibility, decent Americans are routinely writing letters to the editor or calling up Rush Limbaugh to protest the infamy of thought control on the nation's campuses. Even though the platitudes of Allan Bloom, Roger Kimball, and Dinesh D'Souza keep popping up in all the fashionable places, no one—certainly no one in the conservative press corps—has the least suspicion of what is going on.

As Frank Brownlow makes all too clear in this issue, the corruption of academic life is not a new story. Sometime after the First World War universities moved quickly to abolish requirements, lower standards, and introduce bogus disciplines like home economics, social work, and physical education. Foreign languages and philology were replaced with soft courses in literary interpretation, and by the 1960's students were taking for credit courses in mystery novels and world literature surveys taught by professors who had learned none of the necessary languages.

I spent twenty years hanging around colleges and universities, first as student and then as professor. I have never regretted my departure. With a few distinguished exceptions, my teachers and colleagues were dull-witted, lazy, and militantly anti-intellectual. The brighter students catch on early, and in my last year of full-time teaching, one of them asked me—as politely as he could—if a grown man didn't have something better to do with his life than pander to students and hang around with losers, by which he meant my colleagues.

The problems of higher education today are not the fault of Marxists, feminists, or minority scholars. Most faculty members are ignorant boors, and the radicals are no exception, but there are intelligent feminists and incompetent conservatives. As I once tried to explain to a chapter of the National Association of Scholars, their task was to de-politicize, not to re-politicize the academy, and every time they hired or promoted a colleague on the basis of politics, they were augmenting the enemy's strength. Better a wise Turk than a foolish Christian.

But the crusade against political correctness proceeds on the opposite principle, and instead of seeking to reform our institutions of higher learning many disgruntled liberals and their lite-conservative allies wish only to replace the leftist hegemony with the centrist liberal hegemony that ruled the academic roost until the end of the 1960's.

—*Thomas Fleming*

THE OBSCENE CARNIVAL of digging up an American hero who died 141 years ago has come to an end. No arsenic was found in Zachary Taylor's remains, proving that he was not poisoned, which any competent and sensible historian could have told you without this grotesque and impious exercise. (Even if significant traces of arsenic had been found, it would, in fact, have meant nothing. Arsenic was an ingredient in many medicines and embalming fluids in common use in 1850, and its presence would not have proved conspiracy and poisoning.)

We did not learn anything about American history before the Civil War from this business. There was never the slightest possibility that we would do so. The affair tells us a lot, however, that will never be acknowledged, about our intellectually and ethically degraded present; more specifically, it reveals that what passes for the official view of earlier American history is not only ignorant but warped. No society has ever devoted more resources to historical study than modern America, and no society has ever so wantonly cut itself off not only from understanding but from identification with its own past.

This foolish exercise should never have been permitted by Taylor's descendants. There used to be better standards. It is little known, but in the early 19th century there was an effort to remove George Washington's remains from Mount Vernon to the Capitol. It was quietly but firmly refused by the family, backed by overwhelming Virginia public opinion. It would have been an unseemly and unrepublican spectacle, an invasion of privacy that would have made Washington's tomb hostage to whatever band of politicians happened to get control.

It was alleged that President Taylor's symptoms at the time of death suggested poisoning, doubtless by proslavery advocates. Any historian familiar with the period knows the imprecision of medical data and records from that era, and would be extremely cautious in drawing any conclusions from them, especially one so drastic as a presidential assassination. But what gave a fraudulent plausibility to the story was something that is in the air: the belief, or rather faith, on the part of vast hordes of petty intellectuals that any and all evils and enormities, real and imagined, must be traced back to Southerners, and particularly to Southern slaveholders.

The issues that were current in 1850 were quite complicated. It would take several pages to explain them fully, and even then it would be beyond the intellectual capacity of a television news anchor or congressman to understand. But, broadly speaking, they did not involve being for or against slavery, contrary to what the media have repeated *ad nauseum*, for in fact almost no one respectable was against slavery, except in mild and marginal ways. The differences involved the political and economic balance of power between the North and South in regard to the future of the new territory acquired in the Mexican War, further complicated by the efforts of two political parties to maneuver for advantage while muddling and compromising the issues, as American poli-

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ticians always do.

There was a wide variety of viewpoints. Though a Southerner and a slaveholder, Taylor was a conservative Whig who took a moderately Northern stand on the issues, as indeed did many Southern Whigs. The differences involved were quite heated, but hardly clearcut enough to provoke assassination. An assassination theory is only given plausibility by anti-Southern paranoia: the belief that Southerners killed people who disagreed with them. The Old South produced some tough and violent customers, including Old Rough and Ready himself, but they were not the kind that went around poisoning people. It would have been totally out of character. The abolitionists, not the slaveholders, produced the John Browns and Edwin Stantons. Congressman Brooks of South Carolina *publicly* thrashed Charles Sumner, who had unquestionably slandered his state and his family, because he knew Sumner was too cowardly to accept a challenge. Brooks would have scorned a clandestine assault.

Taylor himself, a genuine and heroic soldier though a naive politician, would have repudiated the hysteria of a "slave power conspiracy." Anyone with any sense of context can see the absurdity of the assassination business. Would Taylor's family have had no suspicions? Within a little over a decade Zach Taylor's son-in-law was president of the Confederate States and his son one of its best generals, yet his death is used to slander Southerners. And an ideological phantasm becomes not only a historical interpretation but the cause of legal and scientific actions.

This incident fits a very familiar pattern. Whenever economic, social, and psychic tensions grow in "mainstream" America, there is a clamor of anti-Southern hysteria. It has happened over and over again. As racial hatred and social pathologies intensify in northern cities, it is utterly predictable that establishment intellectuals will escalate their war against Southerners and Southern history.

This is illustrated to perfection by William Freehling's recent book, *The Road to Disunion, Vol. 1*, which purports to be a new history of the coming of the Civil War, and which is a sort of background cover for the nasty Taylor business. This book was hyped for twenty years while in preparation, something that is almost unprecedented in academic circles. Its publication immediately catapulted the author from an already prestigious position at Johns Hopkins to an endowed chair at SUNY-Buffalo.

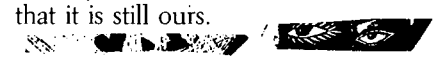
While the book is well researched and even slightly original in marginal ways, and not without a certain cleverness, it is, substantially, as a work of history, an absurd cartoon. It literally reeks and drips with poisonous and near-paranoiac hatred not of slavery but of Southern whites, and, indeed, of almost all of American history.

Even the academic historians have kept some distance and not been entirely persuaded by the book's pretension to be major and classic history. This so-called narrative is full of 1960's slang. The portraits of antebellum American statesmen are at best quarter-truths, but even what truth there is in them has been said a thousand times before by a thousand different writers. The book tells us exactly less than nothing about its subject, in the sense that a quarter-truth is worse than nothing at all.

The success of this book and the Taylor autopsy, which are both based upon a common and false interpretation of history, do tell us that the liberal intellectuals are under terrific pressure. Faced with a moral and social wasteland in modern America, what could be more convenient than to blame the old Southern slaveholding class for all our ills? It gives one such a nice and safe feeling of superiority and freedom from the necessity of any real thought or decision. Whatever the evils of past states of society, which are always easy to find, it is a fact that the Southern planter class of the 18th and 19th centuries provided the preponderance of the most able and honorable Founders and nourishers of the American Republic, and that American society has gone downhill in every way except material wealth since they were destroyed.

If, as the Kerner Commission has made a convention, the Old Southern system of slavery is the cause of all the ills of modern American society, why is it that the further away we get from the plantation, in time and space, the worse the pathologies grow? Or, to put it another way, why, a century and a quarter after the end of the Civil War, is racial hatred, not to mention crime, illegitimacy, and drugs, worse in Chicago than in South Carolina?

In the meantime, we Southerners need an anti-defamation league, though that is not our style. We have learned the hard way the value of patience and a half loaf, and the danger of pushing points of honor too hard, and we have a primitive loyalty to this country, under the foolish delusion that it is still ours.



A vastly disproportionate share of the reservists called up for the late Arabian adventure were from the Southeastern States. Everyone wants representation on the Supreme Court. Southerners, the people who more than any other founded the country and wrote the Constitution, have a representation on the Supreme Court of zero, even though we make up a third or more of the people. Yet, still, we Southerners allow a smirking Yalie to gull us out of our votes by a pretense of fellowship with Baptist ministers and country singers. It speaks well of our hearts but not of our heads.

—*Clyde Wilson*

THE WORLD COUNCIL of Churches convened its Seventh Assembly at Canberra, Australia, early in February 1991, just in time to pronounce a verdict on the Persian Gulf War. The W.C.C. opposed the war on two grounds: that all war is wrong, and that it is not permissible to fight war to right an injustice unless one also fights all wars to right all injustices. The most striking expression of the first position came in a resolution brought by the German churches, calling on the Assembly "to give up any moral or theological justification for the use of military power, be it in war or other forms of oppressive security systems, and become advocates of a just peace." The motion was withdrawn when it became evident that there was insufficient time for the Assembly to act on it, but apparently it did reflect the sentiment of the majority: that just war doctrine no longer has any place in the thinking of the W.C.C. With respect to the second objection, the statement finally issued by the Assembly called on the United Nations Security Council to

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"enforce with equal vigor its earlier resolutions on the territorial integrity of Lebanon, the division of Cypress [and] Israel's withdrawal from the territories it occupied in 1967."

The W.C.C. also took the opportunity to throw as much cold water as it could on plans to celebrate 1992 as the quinquecentennial of Columbus' discovery of America: "We call upon the international religious community and government to resist participating in activities celebrating 1492 designed without input from indigenous people and to join with indigenous people in the celebrations and commemorations they have planned." Logically, this would mean that Catholics could not celebrate the spread of the Gospel to the New World, nor could Protestants remember with anything other than embarrassment their efforts to establish a model Christian society in the wilderness.

This same anti-Western bent is found in a recent issue of the *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, where Harvard professor Diana L. Eck writes, "At a time when the U.S. was mesmerized by the momentum of war, it was clear that the massive armed presence of the West was deeply resented by people throughout the world with a history of Western subjugation." Elsewhere in the same issue, Melanie A. May, a visiting lecturer at Harvard, published a Lenten sermon, preached February 27 in the Divinity School Chapel, calling the war blasphemy and giving, among other things, this reason: "Because an American Air Force colonel, just back from one of the 3,000 bombing raids in 14 hours, can respond to a question about what he would do next by saying, 'Well, first I promised to buy my crew coffee . . . and then we'll get right back to work.' Back to work. Back to killing. . . . The truth of this war is blasphemy because American citizens are so far spared the feeling and the flesh of fear—though not those of sorrow—that hold the Palestinian people and Israeli citizens, along with Iraqis and Kuwaitis, hostage."

It seems the delegates to the W.C.C. as well as Mmes. Eck and May would have preferred the assembled allied forces to have refrained from using their superiority in weaponry. Would they have felt better if there had been massed columns of infantry charging the entrenched Iraqis after the fashion of Napoleon? Or perhaps mounted knights, as used by the French at Crécy, or an infantry phalanx, as used successfully by Alexander the Great in the same region? And would the war have been more moral, less blasphemous, if the United States and its allies had suffered massive casualties? The anti-war position of the W.C.C. and Mmes. Eck and May would make sense from a position of consistent pacifism, but this isn't the basis of their argument. Instead, they temper their reproaches for the U.S. actions in the Gulf with calls for action elsewhere. One suspects that if the United States were to overthrow the government of South Africa by force, they would not call it "blasphemy."

What is involved here, as the attacks on quinquecentennial celebrations of Columbus' voyages of discovery reveal, is hostility to the West in general and to Christendom in particular. It is true that the Spanish *conquistadores* dismantled the indigenous empires of the Aztecs and the Incas in Mexico and South America, and that they were not gentle about it. This is not a matter of great credit or pride to the Christian West, but is it so unusual in the course of human history that it deserves special mention for particular execration? Is it not also true that the Muslim Arabs destroyed the old Persian Empire and the East Roman Empire and made repeated attempts to conquer the European mainland? No one says, "Christians are justified in hating Muslims because of their conquest of Constantinople and of Spain, because of their conquest of Hungary and their siege of Vienna." Perhaps the memory of the Crusades *explains* much of the Muslim resentment of Christians and the West, but it can hardly be said to *justify* it.

In another Andover Chapel sermon printed in the same issue, a staff assistant at Harvard Divinity, Virginia M. Pierce, reproves the United States for having prepared for the Persian Gulf War for ten years and offers her interpretation of Islam as a "religion of peace." Let's be serious. Muslims have *never* been persecuted as a matter of policy by Christians, and yet Islamic regimes generally forbid evangelization and punish the conversion of Muslims to Christianity severely, frequently by death. No real or nominal Christian or member of any other non-Islamic religion is punishable by law in any Christian state for becoming a Muslim. Moreover, Islam did not stretch its sway from the Pyrenees to the Pacific by peaceful missionary work. On the other hand, Christianity spread throughout most of the ancient Roman world *in opposition to the power of the state*, not by military conquest. The Christians of Egypt and North Africa, of Gaul and Greece were won to their faith when it was still proscribed and persecuted. The Muslims of Egypt and Syria, North Africa and Asia Minor were won to Islam after their states had been conquered and when they could derive financial and other benefits from conversion.

Apparently the only "holy war" that is recognizable in some ecclesiastical and academic circles is the war against Christianity and nations tinted with that faith. Christians even outbid one another to cast scorn on and to apologize for their own traditions and faith. Conservative Christians may disagree with this behavior, but with few exceptions they too are cowed into tacitly acquiescing, as in the allegation that the Crusades were something of which Christians should be uniquely ashamed, whereas the *jihad* is only natural and a thing of which Islam may properly be proud.

When we consider the way in which the W.C.C. fawningly receives "guests of other faiths," giving reverent attention to their supercilious criticisms of Christianity, one finds it hard to realize that the ecumenical movement had its origin, early in the century, in the Christian desire to become more effective in world evangelism. It is one thing

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to be hospitable, generous, and tolerant; it is quite another to abandon one's strongest convictions for the sake of an urbane and cosmopolitan eclecticism.

—*Harold O.J. Brown*

FROM A BLACK background an eerie, white sphere illuminates three ice cubes in a glass of clear liquid. At first, there is nothing special about the pallid image, except maybe the lack of color. But look again. Below the glass the bold white letters read "ABSOLUT SUBLIMINAL." Something tugs at your memory. The word "Subliminal" triggers your reaction, unlocking a latent urge inside you. The ice cubes, of course. They want me to look into the ice cubes. There, barely visible, lurks the ghostly prize, your Pavlovian reward, the words "ABSOLUT VODKA."

The ad, which made its debut on the back cover of the *Atlantic Monthly* last year, would seem to give itself away. But in so doing it willfully resurrects a favorite child of American folklore: the subliminal advertisement.

In large part, our preoccupation with the rival claims of cigarette and cornflake ads, and our self-conscious fears of dandruff, body odor, hairy legs, and baldness do not tell the whole story of advertising. From the carny barker to the billboard, practically anything goes when it comes to getting our attention. If bright colors and sexual come-ons are not enough, even the most suspicious and skeptical consumer cannot resist a subliminal suggestion hidden in an ad. The idea behind subliminal advertisements was simple. We were never supposed to be aware of them.

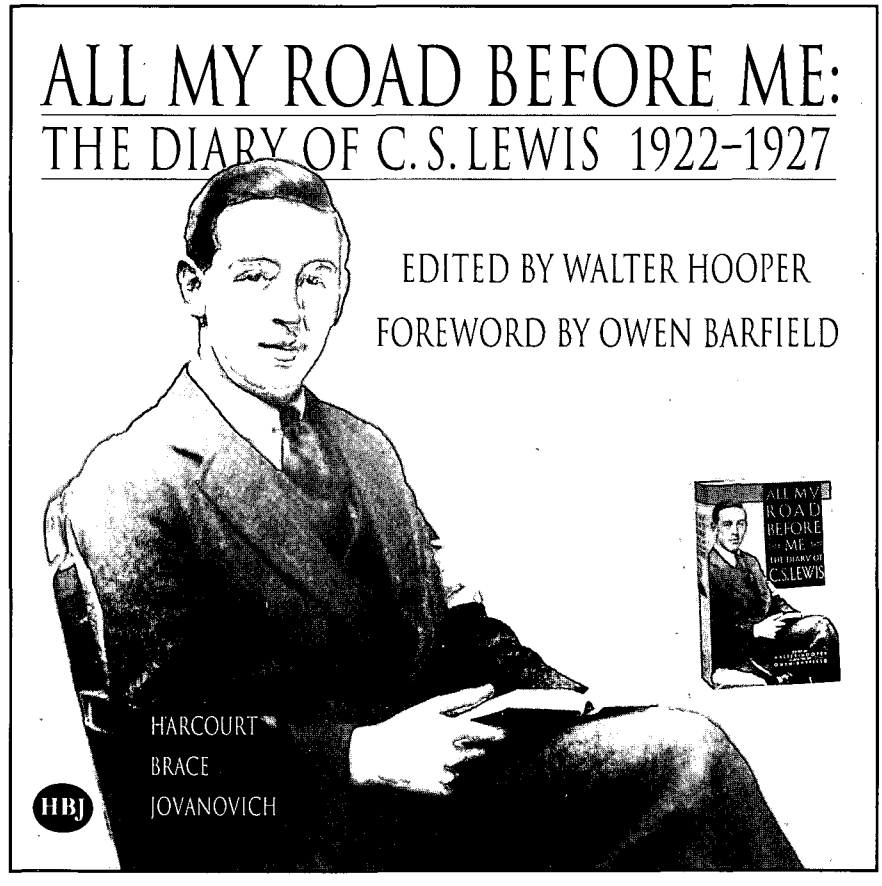
Whether or not we were ever a nation of zombies, cryptically manipulated by Madison Avenue, is open to debate. What we are is a culture of ads. America's churning myth-factory makes or breaks our common parlance. The most effective advertising campaigns are ultimately the ones we talk about. The key to selling a product is often making it a conversation piece, especially among kids, and what better way than to throw the savvy consumer a spitball, an ad campaign just tricky enough to pique our interest, to make the product a household word. If nothing else the myth of subliminal ads did just that: it caught our attention. Hypnotic suggestions may have been ineffective, but the *Zeitgeist* of subliminal ads, like that of UFO's, caught fire. Ads were no longer simply thought of as one-way streets of seduction that hit you on the head with pleading one-liners. They became curiosities. Who knew what evil lurked in the details, what sinister command we were being slipped.

So we talked. The idea behind subconscious suggestion—that if it was there we could not possibly see it—was forgotten. Our skeptical eye freely turned on the ads, attempting to ferret out any indication of foul play. The byways of the American grapevine lit up with countless stories of manipulation. Unleashed, the unfettered lore of subliminalism flourished. S-E-X spelled out on a model's back and skulls in ice cubes are the stuff of legend. Who was not initiated to the Big Screen without a warning about encoded messages that drove mass audiences to the candy counter? There is the now-infamous pack of Camel unfiltered cigarettes. You either see a sexually aroused man or a voluptuous nude woman painted into the camel's leg.

The "Absolut" ad revels in America's advertising *Zeitgeist*. It is a tribute to the myth of subliminal ads. The shock-value of sex, violence, and mysticism may be gone, but their mystique remains. The bold letters spelling out "ABSOLUT SUBLIMINAL" at the bottom of the ad beg us to question the content of the ice cubes overhead. But we have been tricked. Where we expected to find the taboo of a death image we find instead a corporate logo.

In fact, "ABSOLUT SUBLIMINAL" could easily be rewritten "ABSOLUT-LY OBVIOUS." The ad encourages a symbolic reading over the original idea behind subliminalism, for it is not covertly selling to our primary emotions of fear, anger, and desire. Its target is our national myth-factory. For all its emblematic allusion to consumer engineering, the ad takes the guise of a clever joke, distilling subliminal advertising into nothing more than a pop-culture phenomenon.

—*Daniel Mendel-Black*



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Principalities & Powers

by Samuel Francis

If the American Republic is defunct, and if most Americans no longer subscribe to the classical republicanism that defined the Republic as its public orthodoxy, what is the principal issue of American politics? Ever since the Progressive Era, the issue that has divided Americans into the two political and ideological camps of "right" and "left" has been whether or not to preserve the Republic. The Progressives (at least their dominant wing) argued that the small-scale government, entrepreneurial business economy, and the localized and private social and cultural fabric that made a republic possible was obsolete at best and at worst repressive and exploitative. They and their descendants in New Deal-Great Society liberalism pushed for an enlarged state fused with corporations and unions in the economy and with massive, bureaucratized cultural and educational organizations. In contrast, the "right" pulled in the opposite direction, defending the Republic and the social and economic structure that enabled republicanism to flourish, but with less and less success and with ever-diminishing understanding of what it was doing.

Today the conflict over that issue is finished. The Progressivist empire has replaced the old American Republic, and even on the self-proclaimed "right" today, virtually no one other than the beleaguered paleoconservatives defends republicanism in anything like its pristine form. The collapse of the conflict over republicanism is the main reason why the labels "left" and "right" no longer make much sense and also why —much more than the end of the Reagan administration and the Cold War—the "conservative coalition" of the Reagan era is falling apart. Mr. Reagan's main legacy was to show his followers, who for decades groused and griped against "Big Government," that they too could climb aboard the Big Government hayride and nibble crumbs at its picnic. With such "conservatism" now centered mainly in Washington and its exponents happily dependent on the federal megastate, the historic *raison d'être* of the American "right" has ceased to exist. Such conservatives no longer even pretend to want to preserve or restore the old Republic, and it now turns out that even when they said they did, it was all pretty much a charade anyway.

Nevertheless, the end of the conflict over the Republic and of the battle between left and right does not mean that there are no conflicts at all. Indeed, the American imperium, having few roots in the population except insofar as it can feed its client constituencies, is riven by conflicts. The empire might be able to strike back, but it has never been able to formulate its own orthodoxy that would distinguish it from traditional republicanism and provide a consensus that could discipline conflicts. That indeed is why the megastate has retained the forms of republicanism. Unable to legitimize itself through the ideology of Progressivist liberalism, it steals the clothes of its republican predecessor to justify its revolutionary agenda.

At the heart of the empire—or megastate, or managerial regime, or leviathan, or whatever you want to call it—there is a vacuum, and the main issue of the last decade of this century and the first decade of the next will be over what is going to fill that empty space. The ability to fill it, to articulate a public orthodoxy for the country, is in large part what it means to be master of the imperium, for whoever is able to acquire enough cultural power to define what the megastate is supposed to do and for whom it is supposed to do it will achieve Antonio Gramsci's "cultural hegemony" and will carve his own initials on the blank slate of the empire.

One of the principal contestants for hegemony in the megastate will be the largely Middle American constituency of the now-decapitated American right. The end of the left-right conflict and the absorption of its leadership within the megastate means that the mass following of the right has become a body without a head. That following thus finds itself, its interests and values, unrepresented in the contest for control of the megastate of the next century, and that situation cannot last. Sooner or later, if Middle Americans are not to become extinct, they will generate a new, independent social and political identity or consciousness and will construct a movement based on that consciousness that will demand not only representation in, but also dominance of, the regime.

But they will not, as their forebears did, demand republicanism. Middle Americans are a diverse bunch, consisting of small businessmen in manufacturing, small farmers burdened with debt and confronted with absorption by agribusiness, and white ethnic blue-collar workers who find their jobs disappearing because of foreign competition and their advancement thwarted by megastate-mandated racial and gender quotas. What these and similar groups share, despite their diversity, is a common frustration with the megastate in its present structure, along with a seemingly paradoxical dependence on it.

Their frustrations might lead them toward a revival of classical republican, small-government conservatism, but their dependence on the state forbids it. Middle Americans are as much wrapped up in the tentacles of the megastate as the elite that runs it or the underclass that is its main beneficiary. Middle Americans buy their homes with loans provided by the federal government. They educate their children in public schools and send them to colleges, themselves recipients of federal funds, with federal student aid. They work for corporations regulated by and linked to the state and are members of labor unions protected by federal laws. They receive federal farm subsidies, and the food they produce and eat, the highways on which they travel, the air they breathe, and the television they watch all are subject to the laws and regulations of the federal megastate. Most Americans, Middle or not, lodge few objections to this kind of regimentation; what they do object to is that it doesn't work all that well—that is, that they don't get from it as much as they want or expect—or that federal regimentation often seems to help others more than it helps them. Middle Americans don't object to the megastate in principle, but they do object to it in practice.

Hence, the agenda of an authentic Middle American political consciousness would include retaining many of

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the structures and functions of the megastate, and in this respect it would not be attractive to most paleoconservatives or paleolibertarians. Middle Americans would insist on a state that protected their material security—through such "middle-class welfare" programs as health insurance, unemployment benefits, pensions, and labor regulations, as well as economic policies intended to secure their jobs, farms, and businesses.

Yet, at the same time, a Middle American agenda would involve a fairly radical dismantlement and restructuring of the megastate. As it is presently constituted, the megastate exists for the purpose of social manipulation. Its elite, trained in the techniques of social engineering and social therapy, gains power and budgetary resources by inventing social "problems" and "crises" and then designing and applying "solutions" for them. Obviously, every "solution" creates yet another "problem," so the mission of the bureaucratic elite (and its cousins in universities and think-tanks) is never complete. The solutions are characteristically egalitarian and redistributive and assist the elite in delegitimizing, reconstructing, and otherwise manipulating traditional Middle American institutions and beliefs.

Moreover, most of the "problems" the elite invents are located within or about the underclass—racism, poverty, crime, cities, AIDS, drugs, illiteracy, illegitimacy and family breakdown, infant mortality, the lack of underclass political representation, etc., etc.—so that a vast amount of money, energy, and attention is devoted to the underclass, not to Middle Americans, who nevertheless are expected to pay for the underclass as well as for the elite and the programs that support it. The megastate, then, in its current form, is an apparatus that largely serves the interests of the elite and its underclass ally, at the expense, material and cultural, of the middle class.

A serious Middle American political consciousness would therefore reject and seek to excise the problem-solution ratchet that is the motor of the present regime as well as other functions intended to manipulate and deconstruct traditional institutions. Thus, the preoccupation of the incumbent elite with racism, sexism, "civil rights," social "pathologies" that are little more than normative Middle American institutions and beliefs, and the whole apparatus in state and culture by which white male "hegemony" is challenged and undermined would have to go. This would involve more than simply formulating new policies and punching a few buttons on the megastate's control panel. It would involve ripping the entrails out of the elite itself by eliminating much of the bureaucracy and its agencies and decoupling the elite of the megastate from its Siamese twins in the cultural organs. Abolishing tax-exemptions, subsidies, and federal contracts for the universities and foundations where manipulative social policy is born would be a practical way to begin.

It is the radicalism of such a Middle American consciousness that definitively separates it from both New Deal-Great Society liberalism and from the "Big Government conservatism" and neoconservatism that flourish today. The real goal of the liberal megastate was not to secure the well-being of Middle America but to level and destroy its distinctive cultural identity by identifying it as the "social environment" that bred pathologies and dysfunctions. The real goal of "Big Government conservatives" and neoconservatives has never been to dismantle the structures of the megastate and redesign its functions, but simply to capture them and make them work more efficiently, with "efficiency" implicitly defined as the more practical realization of their liberal goals. "Big Government conservatives" do nothing to challenge the orientation of the megastate toward the interests of the elite and its tame underclass, and their whole agenda seems to be centered on locking that orientation into place.

Middle Americans have long piggybacked on mainstream conservatism, but they have done so only by obscuring (or failing to understand completely) the differences that distinguish their interests and aspirations from the increasingly rootless and fruitless fixations of the conventional right. With the collapse of the right and the obsolescence (not to say the fraudulence) of its republican ideology, Middle Americans have an opportunity—and, indeed, face the necessity—of articulating a consciousness that more accurately reflects their material interests and their cultural identity.

For those who still adhere to classical republicanism, the emergence of a Middle American radicalism would no doubt be distasteful, but their own long lack of success in reviving their political ideals ought perhaps to induce a certain humility among them, as well as a willingness to postpone displays of ideological passion in order to consummate later an eventual and more enduring fulfillment. If the classical republican ideal is ever to rise from its ashes, it can do so only among those who retain even now the vestigial moral and social discipline that renders republican government possible. The only remaining locus of such republican discipline in the United States at the end of the 20th century is the Middle American stratum that is now a hammer without a head. If it can construct its own head, it may be able to forge a new civil order from which a republican phoenix can someday be reborn.

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Sermon for William Anderson

by Thomas Fleming

"In every part of every living thing
is stuff that once was rock."
—*Lorine Niedecker, "Lake Superior"*

After forty years of dying the world is new;
the sky above all metaphor is blue,
houses a bleed of brush-strokes on this street
I once walked down to school and back in sleet-
disheveled October dawns and bee-bumbling spring
vacation Fridays for nine years: Wyoming
Avenue, which dwindles to a track,
running out to the woods; and past the woods the lake
stretched unfretted beneath the wind-gnarled rock
the glacier thrust. On this familiar walk
to school I read the graduate dean's decree:
"Fleming: Please be advised your Ph.D.
in classics is suspended till you pass,
with grade of B or better, a sixth grade class
in social studies you did not complete."
After thirty years the teacher must be dead—
still parroting her paradigms underground—
and I was sure they'd pulled the old school down,
but I (or everything else) must be wrong:
I see the red brick building, which so long
had fouled itself with smoke from the soft coal
the School Board fed the furnace with.
The roll
was being called by now, and late for class
I cut across the pupil-worried grass
and down the oak floors meant to dignify
the sweated fact and oft-repeated lie
that stands in for the truth with half the risks,
the sums told off on fingers under desks,
the photo exposés of Greece and Rome.
Searching beneath the desktop for the gum
I planted, I find the initials carved: TF.
After a filmstrip on Prokofiev—
attacked by Stalin's music commissar
on his return to the U.S.S.R.—
the pupils, kids I must have seen somewhere,
stare past Gulliver squeezed into his chair,
while teacher reads the new curriculum:
"Athens—with capital A, the ancient home
of Plato, Thales, Homer, Pericles,
was first of all the world's democracies.
(Thales, you remember, fell down a well

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from thinking for himself and went to hell.)
The Spartans were the worst of all the Greeks;
they beat their children, killed slaves, lived like sheiks
and abused their wives. Bullies, braggarts, liars,
they ran like dogs when they saw King Darius.
Repeat this after me: the Athenians, good
in general, were bad in owning slaves and should
have freed their women and let aliens vote.
Boys and girls, we learn these things by rote
until we get them right."
It all came back,
the way they put the question, cranked the rack
until you learned never to cast out nines
as mother taught. "Crayon *inside* the lines."
I'd dreamed I had escaped, they'd won at last:
Here I am, an exile in my own past—
my one last refuge from the Cosmopole,
torn down to build this prison of the soul
they call democracy: the party state
of bought elections, the engineered debate
on how to mow the artificial lawn
that stretches to a quiet grave, a yawn
after history's harsh barbaric sex.
I'm out
the door, back on the street to see our house,
which someone's painted dirty shades of brown.
The same delinquent tore the lilacs down
and stuck, where lilies of the valley grew,
a K-Mart swingset and a barbecue.
I watched them watching television, through
the window, talking back to Donahue
as to a man. Turning my way, Phil
transfixed me with a look I knew would kill—
"Is it life or death?" he asked the audience,
"Dial 1-900, vote for fifty cents"—
unless I dropped my eyes and made a break.
I see my feet running out to the lake
across a sodden field of strawberries
and sweet clover that once had stained our knees,
to the stone-stubbled hill, where we'd built a shack
to hide out from our parents, smoke cigars,
divide up into armies and wage wars
that always ended in an apple feast,
with medals and promotions for the best
eye-punchers and rock-slingers in the sham
combat. And Bill, who died in Vietnam
(I called in '69, just passing through.
His sister said, "Bill's dead. I thought you knew."
And I remembered how he'd loved John Wayne
in *Sands of Iwo Jima*. "How much pain?"
he used to ask, was there when you got shot.)
He was about the best of our bad lot,
who believed the things he didn't learn in school.
He loved our camp, this shack, the pool
we swung from the elm tree over, reckless boys,
Trojans and skin-kneed Greeks who built their Troys
and toppled them in the course of a summer's day
till September came and took them all away.

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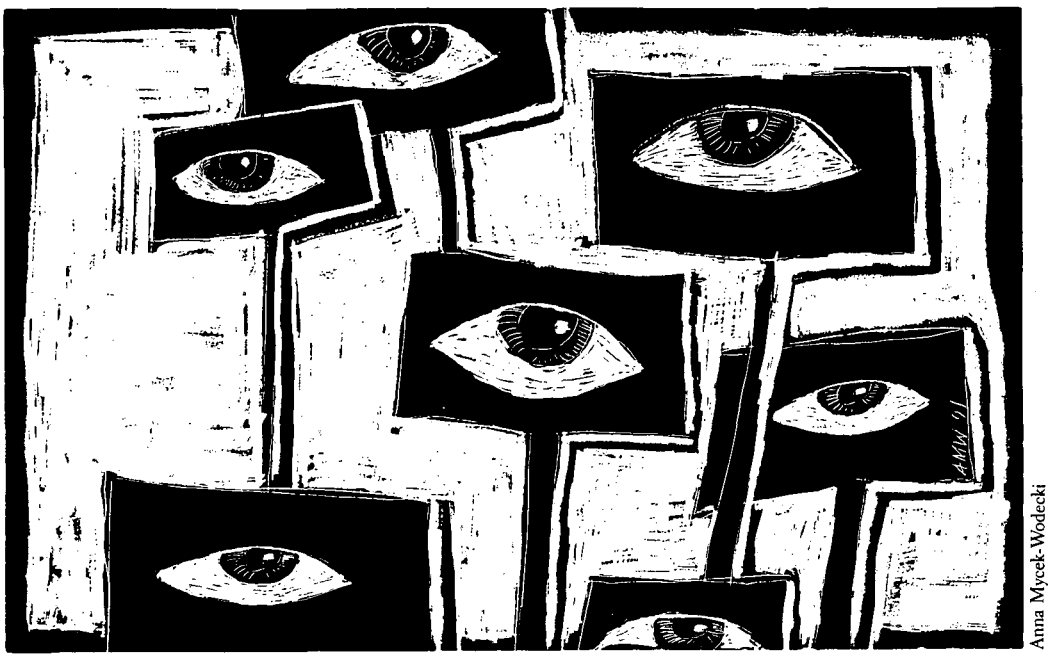

Anna Mycek-Wodecki

The Terror of the Obvious

by George Watson

There is a painting on my wall that fascinates me. That is partly because it is beautiful, partly because of the story it tells. It is a large Dutch oil of 1658 by Hendrik van Vliet, better known for his church interiors, and it shows two men solemnly seated at a dark table lit only by a candle — the one speaking from a book under his left hand, the other about to reply. The most probable view is that the first man is Nicodemus who, according to St. John's gospel, came to Jesus by night. The second man, in that case, whose shadow crosses the wall to touch him, is Jesus.

Nicodemus has been the type of the literal man for two millennia, which is why, being literal myself, the story fascinates me. He is saying that one can only be born once, and he is about to be told that one can be born of the flesh and of the spirit: twice-born, in fact. One day he will help bury his master. In Renaissance English the adjective *nicodemical* is fairly common, meaning excessively literal; and there is even one recorded use of the verb to *nicodemize*, in 1624, meaning to misinterpret by failing to note that something is metaphorically meant.

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In academia, at least, there are not many Nicodemuses now, and few enough in any literary age. Fame has not brought him honor. Though a learned man and a member of the Sanhedrin, he was never a hero, and his famous objection in the third chapter of St. John, like his help to Joseph of Arimathea after the crucifixion, assures him at best of a secondary role. The literal man, it is widely felt, is the one who gets it wrong — to be corrected, once and for all, by the seer and the prophet of God. Since the modern critic, at his most ambitious, sometimes aspires to be a seer, anyone who in academic debate denies that an author is writing metaphorically or symbolically is likely to lose points, and "I think he just meant it literally" is not a seminar remark likely to excite much approval. All that needs to be seen, as an analogy, in context. In a secular age the critic's claims are not to the miraculous but to the hermeneutical; and it is significant that hermeneutics, which once meant biblical interpretation conducted by believers, has long since become the familiar tool of secular analysts who interpret works that, as they imagine, call for no commitment or faith.

In the past quarter-century interpretation of that sort has powerfully invaded criticism from the austere world of Old and New Testament studies — Frank Kermode's lively and elegant book *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (1979) is a classic instance — and receding layers of meaning, as they are laid bare to view, are supposed

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in that school of thought to reflect the profundity of the theorist.

Indeterminacy is the wear. Umberto Eco's *The Open Work* (1962), for example, resolutely celebrates indeterminacy of meaning in literary masterpieces; and in *The Role of the Reader* (1979) he rejects the notion, once propounded by Lévi-Strauss, that works of art are "endowed with precise properties" or "the stiffness of a crystal." Eco's open text, by contrast, does not permit of misinterpretations—only of competing interpretations. No view is wrong: it is at best revealing, and revealing only of the speaker; at worst, incomplete. No subtlety is to be rejected, no ambiguity denied. Assertion gives place to symbol, and the critic does not refute claims but welcomes them into an ever-wider gathering of possible views. His most earnest censure, if he is consistent with his principles, is to ask of an interpreter to wait his turn, much as a traffic cop might raise a hand to an advancing vehicle to signify that it should pause, if only for a moment, to let others through. The object is continuous flow. There is no destination to his task, as he conceives it, and where others are bound is their concern and not his.

All that leaves Nicodemus nowhere. It deprives literature, whether deliberately or inadvertently, of its power to inform, to censure and to judge, to subvert or to disturb. Its effects beyond literature may be though another matter, but that is perhaps to be doubted. It is not always easy, or even possible, to distinguish critical reading from reading in general, and a handful of instances drawn from public affairs may help to make the issue look grave and the cost of denying the literal, at times, a heavy cost. In *Beyond the Pale* (1963), for example, a biography of Sir Oswald Mosley, once leader of the British Union of Fascists, by his son Nicholas, it is told how Mosley after the war would shudder at any mention of the name Adolf Hitler, whom he had known personally in the 1930's, clouding his eyes and murmuring "terrible little man" as he recalled what Hitler eventually did. What Hitler did was what in *Mein Kampf* he had said he would do, and Mosley had read *Mein Kampf*. In *Politics and Literature* (1977), I suggested that if poets like W.H. Auden and polemicists like André Gide publicly supported communism in the 1930's, it was quite probably because they believed in it, and the derision that nicodemical view was greeted with was considerable. Two years later Margaret Thatcher announced as prime minister to the House of Commons that Sir Anthony Blunt had been a Soviet spy, and it suddenly became easier to believe that nice young men who had been to good schools and universities could act, as well as speak, in support of foreign dictators. Or again, when in a speech at Harvard Ernst Nolte of the Free University in Berlin quoted Hitler on genocide and, to his own rhetorical question "Where have we heard this before?" replied "In the writings of Karl Marx," he was treated as hopelessly naïve. "You don't imagine Marx meant it *literally*?" a Harvard professor asked him incredulously, as passages in which Marx and Engels advocated mass-murder were read to him. The nicodemical answer, which is also the right one, is that they did.

A refusal to nicodemize, then, has its costs, as bowdlerizing a famous text like Shakespeare or the Bible has costs, and it is time and more than time that someone said a word for the literal. The modern Nicodemus is accustomed to being shouted down and outfaced, by now, so he may need to be emboldened. He has advantages, after all, not given to the figure in my Dutch painting. He is not confronted with divine wisdom, merely the dogmatics of critical theory. He would have good sense on his side if he protested that, if all assertions are figurative or ironic, then no assertion—not even that one—could count at its face value. If, in a card game, all the cards were "wild" and could signify anything, then there could be no game, since any hand could mean anything at all; just as, if nothing is certain, then that too is not. Oddly enough, Nicodemus when challenged seldom says any of these things. He has been cowed; he shares, all too often, the terror of the obvious.

There have been heroic exceptions. Some thirty years ago, for example, William Empson in *Milton's God* (1961) proposed that Milton in *Paradise Lost* meant what he said: that it was, in truth, no easy matter to justify the ways of God, and that the doctrine of the atonement was genuinely difficult. The book caused a large ripple, but it is notable that many unbelievers as well as many believers have refused to accept Empson's strenuously nicodemical point. Milton, they say, cannot really have meant what he said. *Paradise Lost* is a poem, isn't it? And Empson has shown himself totally ignorant of the conventions of epic form. Even in the greatest of English epics, the cards are easily imagined to be wild, and interpretable at will. We are reluctant to be literal.

The prestige of the nonliteral has led to some odd results, not least in higher education.

The largest result might be called weightlessness, in the sense that few assertions in literature are by now felt to *have weight*, and to the point of making a difference to what anyone believes or does. They exist, so to speak, only in air. To be trained to read, in that tradition, is to be trained to discount what one reads, and the armory of critical discounting is by now a well-stocked and impressive one: that all characters—in Shakespeare, for example—are based on stock types, so that Shylock cannot really be evidence of anti-Semitism; that all poems, and not just monologues like Robert Browning's, presuppose a dramatic speaker, so that T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* nowhere speaks in his own person, and not even, altogether reliably, in *Four Quartets*; that symbol and irony, if not omnipresent, hover eternally in the background or around the corner; that all opinion is ideology; that all language systems impose patterns that correspond only accidentally, if at all, to the real world; that the real exists simultaneously and attempted accounts of it only sequentially, being couched in words, so that the real always evades description. It is not an exaggeration to say that much advanced training in literature, by now, is training in how to use such techniques of evasion and escape. The critic is Houdini, or Houdini's assistant, forever out of danger and somewhere else.

To argue so far is to widen the argument beyond anything Nicodemus ever knew. Weightlessness in that style is a disappearance trick; it converts great art to air. When the late Roland Barthes called literature "the art of disappointment" (*"l'art de la déception"*), he forbade himself, and anyone who agreed with him, to imagine that authentic knowledge could ever lie at the end of any critical inquiry. That claim may look new, but we have been here before.

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The Ancients had Pyrrhonism, or radical skepticism, and the *Essais* of Montaigne once argued that disagreements about God or the gods, down the ages, left the believer with nothing to rely on but an act of faith:

> Now trust to your philosophy; after hearing that racket from so many philosophical minds, boast that *you* have found the bean in the cake (II.12).

Anyone on Twelfth Night who, when the cake was cut and handed out, found the bean in his slice became King of the Bean; and Montaigne here, in "The Apology for Raimond Sebond," implies that the claim to know is as idle as a reveler's paper hat at a party. His title is empty, he implies, and the joke is on him.

So weightlessness has been here before; and over the centuries the world of letters, like philosophy, has known, abandoned, and readopted radical doubt and the denial of the obvious.

The larger effects of that mood are to be considered. One chief effect of weightlessness, and in all probability its chief motive, is to make life more comfortable. Skepticism only pretends to be subversive and defiant; in truth it is cozy. "Interpretation makes art manageable, conformable" Susan Sontag acutely remarked years ago in *Against Interpretation* (1966), contrasting it with "transparence," which is the highest value in art. "In place of hermeneutics we need an erotics of art," she concluded, aptly quoting a letter of Oscar Wilde: "Only shallow people . . . do not judge by appearances." The erotic analogy is striking, and it is certain that one can fall in love with great art at first sight. The lover, in that case, like lovers elsewhere, might reasonably be impatient at insistent demands to tell what he knows, since talk is only incidental to affection. It is the essence, by contrast, of what poets and critics do, and that is the dilemma out of which modern weightlessness is born. The skeptic-critic is not like a lover and cannot be silent. He is right to sense that what he has to say is a modest affair and never the whole story, wrong to assume that it needs to be the whole story. He is baffled, for instance, by the realization that there is no One Correct Interpretation of a work of literature, and bewildered by the discovery that, as George Orwell once put it, there is no argument by which one can defend a poem. Like Montaigne on God and the gods, he is alternately dazzled and puzzled by the diversity of intelligent views before his eyes; and, like him, fearful of the charge of arrogance, or seeming arrogance—of appearing to sit at a critical tea party wearing a paper hat and calling himself the King of the Bean. He wants, in any case, and as anyone would, to be king for more than a night.

The prestige of the nonliteral has led to some odd results, not least in higher education.

In recent years kingship has lain with the skeptics, and that grand old game of more-skeptical-than-thou that began in Paris in the late 1950's and moved to Yale and elsewhere a dozen years later, now looks exhausted and unamusing. It lacks an audience, and leaves critical theorists talking to one another at international conferences and not always listening. Hence the new mood abroad in literary study, which would like to find itself again. There is now a call for a sure footing and a guide to lead the way. If that call is resolute and sincere, then I suggest it can best be answered by listening first to what philosophers in this century have said. The 19th century is a long time ago. Marx and Nietzsche are not an avant-garde but prophets who looked old-hat to our grandparents, and what Karl Popper and Ludwig Wittgenstein have to tell us, especially in their later writings, could make a lot of recent critical skepticism look tired and outmoded. In *The Certainty of Literature* (1989), in an argument that acknowledged its debt to Wittgenstein's posthumous book *On Certainty* (1969), I offered reasons for believing that literary judgments are as objective as any judgments that mankind ever makes, including those in mathematics and the natural sciences. That is an argument that will continue. But the search for a sure footing is one that will need to be pursued with some discrimination and care.

The dangers are familiar. If the search turns into a demand, yet again, for a theoretical basis to literary studies, then it may need to be said again that there is no such basis and can be none, since any theory that claimed to be that would itself need a theoretical basis or represent a fatal contradiction to itself. If all claims to knowledge need agreed foundations, after all, then so does that claim, and so would the claim that next offered itself: and the next, and the next. Theory is not a sure footing but a wandering across dark marshlands after a will-o'-the-wisp. Nor is the demand for exactitude a hopeful one, since many truths are indeterminate in their nature and none the less truths, like the limits of a desert or the difference between night and day. Nor is truth always a statement or proposition, still less an agreed proposition, since there is no certain presumption that all knowledge can be told; and counter-instances like the taste of coffee show that much one certainly knows cannot be spoken of or defined. Nor should one tolerate the demand for completeness, since the whole of everything, as Henry James once said, is never told.

All that, if duly pondered, might diminish and assuage a terror of the obvious, and the modern critic may yet outlive his fear of literature, much as the Ancients outlived Plato's attack on art. But it must be concluded that the terror of the obvious, in the end, is not wholly irrational. Great art really is alarming. It can frighten, subvert, and appall. If the modern critic, by overinterpretation, has striven to render it manageable and conformable, he has at least paid a reluctant tribute to something that is there, and responded, in unheroic fashion, with some due sense of awe. He is like a man trying not to look at the sun: not because he doubts that it is there, in the end, but because he knows that it is and is afraid of what it might do. Great art can blind. "Mysteries are like the sun," said Donne in his third satire, "dazzling, yet plain to all eyes." The obvious can maim and hurt; and the modern skeptic, like Plato, has paid it the greatest of all compliments by refusing to look. The next question is to ask what happens when he forgets his terror and turns his face to the sun. ◈

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Can Humanity Forget What It Knows?

by Jacob Neusner

Anna Mycek-Wodecki

Civilization hangs suspended, from generation to generation, by the gossamer strand of memory. If only one cohort of mothers and fathers fails to convey to its children what it has learned from its parents, then the great chain of learning and wisdom snaps. If the guardians of human knowledge stumble only one time, in their fall collapses the entire edifice of knowledge and understanding. More important, therefore, than finding new things is sifting and refining the received truths. And the generation that will go down through time bearing the burden of disgrace is not the one that has said nothing new—for not much new marks the mind of any age—but the one that has not said what is true. These self-evident truths concerning the continuity of civilization pertain not only to wisdom, which philosophy and religion preserve. They address much more concrete matters than the wise conduct of affairs. There are things that we know because of the hard work of people who have come before, knowledge that we have on account of other people's trial and error. And that is knowledge that also hangs in the balance from age to age, knowledge that we can and do forget, with awful consequences for those who will come after us, to whom we are answerable.

The simple fact is that we either remember or recapitulate the work of finding out—one or the other. And now, with five thousand years of recorded science and philosophy, mathematics, history and social science, literature and music and art, if we lose it all, we probably shall never regain what is gone. It would be too much work, require resources of time and intellect not likely to come to hand. Lest my meaning be lost in abstraction, let me give a concrete case. When the turret of the battleship *Iowa* blew up, people could not repair it. The reason is that the materials and technological know-how to repair the guns, available when the ship was built during World War II, were lost beyond recovery. That is what I mean when I say civilization hangs suspended by fragile strands indeed. So too, when people decided to resume construction of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, it was discovered that only a few stone masons were left in the world who could work the giant blocks from which a cathedral is built; they could train young apprentices, or the work would not be done. Languages too have come and gone; someone once told me of meeting the last person in the world who spoke Cornish as a native language, and linguists make haste to preserve what is about to be lost as an example of the potentialities of intelligible speech.

I owe this point to a biologist at Rutgers University, David Ehrenfeld, writing in *Orion* (Autumn 1989), who argues that "loss of knowledge and skills is now a big problem in our universities." It is a problem, he maintains, not only in the humanities, which we know are dying, but in the natural sciences. His case in point is one that surprised me. He says, "We are on the verge of losing our ability to tell one plant or

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animal from another and of forgetting how the known species interact among themselves and with their environments." This is because subjects fall out of the curriculum, or are taught piecemeal by people on the periphery of the university. He says, for example, "Classifications of Higher Plants," "Marine Invertebrates," "Ornithology," "Mammalogy," "Cryptogams" (ferns and mosses), "Biogeography," "Comparative Physiology"—"you may find some of them in the catalogue, but too often with the notation alongside, 'not offered.'" Ehrenfeld explains: "The features that distinguish lizards from snakes from crocodilians from turtles . . . aren't any less accepted or valid than they were twenty-five years ago, nor are they easier than they used to be to learn on your own from books without hands-on laboratory instruction." But people do not work in those fields.

Ehrenfeld further explains why the question is an urgent one. "One morning last April, at eight o'clock, my phone rang. It was a former student of mine who is now a research endocrinologist at a major teaching hospital in Houston. She had an odd question: at what point in animal evolution was the hemoglobin molecule first adopted for use specifically as an oxygen carrier? It was an essential piece of information for medical research she was planning." The information the student wanted was in an elementary "introduction to comparative biochemistry." When Ehrenfeld asked colleagues who was working on this sort of thing, he found out—nobody. The graduate students had never even heard of the field of comparative biochemistry.

Now here we have a very concrete case of the loss of knowledge once possessed. Ehrenfeld comments: "not outdated, not superseded, not scientifically or politically controversial, not even merely frivolous: a whole continent of important human knowledge gone." It was not dead, but it lived only in books, which no one read or understood or could use in the quest for knowledge. Ehrenfeld draws from this story conclusions that need not detain us. In his view the loss of comparative biochemistry is because of the flow of funds into the wrong hands, into the hands of people who are not "capable of transmitting our assembled knowledge of the natural world to the next generation." So, he says, "I fear for conservation when there is no one left in our places of learning who can tell one moth from another, no one who knows the habits of hornbills, no one to puzzle over the diversity of hawthorns."

If we now take the case as exemplary, we may ask ourselves where, in society, do we assign the task of holding on to what we know and making sure the next generation gains access to that? The stakes are too high for the answers to invoke the episodic and the anecdotal: "here am I, send me." The accident of individuals finds its match in the uncertainty of books; putting whatever is worth knowing into books, encyclopedias for example, will not serve, since mere information does not inform, and facts without explanation of what they mean and how they fit together do not bear meaning or serve a purpose. In age succeeding age, in some few places, the mind of humanity in the past is recreated, not preserved inert but actively replicated, reenacted as a model for the mind of humanity to come. I speak, of course, of schools as those few places, of teachers as the actors of knowledge in intellectually replicable form. For to preserve what we know we must repeat the processes of discovery, since the only real mode of learning is through discovery, which permits us not merely to know things, but to understand things. All the facts in the world about moths and hornbills and hawthorns, left uninterpreted, will not yield comparative biochemistry.

As it happens, I have spent my life working on a document that was composed so as to present, within a few volumes, the life and structure, the way of life and world view and social theory, of an entire world of humanity: the Jewish people. A few remarkable intellectuals undertook to write a book that would serve as not a mere source of information but as a handbook of civilization: how to form society, what society had to know to do its work, all of useful knowledge so formed as to yield meaning and order and coherence, the deep structure of a social being. To write a book to do that, they worked out not an encyclopedia of information but a guidebook for a journey of mind, of intellect: this is how to think, this is what to think, this is why to think. They made certain, therefore, that what they knew would be known by coming generations, not because the institutions would endure, nor because the politics would accord to their doctrines priority of place. Indeed, the writers of this document would have found surprising Professor Ehrenfeld's certainty that problems are to be solved by putting money in the right hands, or keeping it out of the wrong ones.

They did two things. First, they wrote a book that could be sung. Second, they wrote notes to the music, so that anyone could sing the song. They did not spell out everything; rather, they gave signals of how, if you wanted to spell things out, you could do so on your own: don't ask, discover. So they opened the doors of learning to make room for all to come, learning serving then as an active verb, with discovery its synonym. These notes—signals of how a moving argument would be reconstructed, how reason might be recapitulated—were few, not the eight notes of our octave, but not an infinite repertoire of replicable sounds either. In any case the medium—notes to the music—is only secondary. Their primary insight into how civilization as they proposed to frame it should be shaped lay in another matter altogether. It had to do with their insistence upon the urgency of clear and vigorous and rigorous thought, the priority of purpose to argument, the demand for ultimate seriousness about things to be critically examined. Through practical reasoning and applied logic, they formed the chains to link mind to mind, past to future, through a process that anyone could enter—and no one, once in, would leave.

I said they wrote a book that could be sung. I mean that both literally, in that their writing was a document meant to be said out loud, not read silently; and in that it was meant to be studied in community through debate, not meditated upon privately and personally; writing that was, in the old and classic sense, political—public, shared, subject to coercion, if in the form of reason rather than naked power to be sure. But I mean that in another sense as well. James Baldwin said in a short story that every song begins to cry. So when I say they wrote a book that could be sung, I mean to invoke a metaphor of a piece of writing that begins not with the words and the music, but in the guts, a piece of

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writing that is thought before thinking, insight before application and explication, attitude and emotion prior to their reformulation in propositions formed of words. I speak of revelation, such as most of us have known and of which all of us have heard: the unearned insight, the unanticipated moment of understanding. That is what I mean by a book that could be sung, of truth in a form of such art that whoever hears will see and feel, know in a knowledge that is defining.

So, if it is possible to forget what we have learned, leaving for a coming generation the task of recapitulating processes of discovery and interpretation, it also is possible to imagine and even identify the means by which, as a matter of fact, humanity has defended itself from the loss of what it already has in hand. If I use the Talmud, on which I work, as a case in point, others may well identify other appropriate cases. I think of such fields as music and mathematics, philosophy and its offspring in the social sciences, and a variety of the natural sciences as well, as fields of learning that link us to the accumulated treasures of important knowledge and sustaining truth. What they have in common are rules of right thought, a heritage of conventions to be replicated, retested, and realized from age to age, a process of testing and reevaluation, an endless openness to experiment, whether in the laboratory or in the mind. Much that we in universities identify as useful and important knowledge qualifies. For as a matter of fact, so far as the sum of human knowledge is concerned, either we in universities will convey it to the coming generation, or it will be lost.

So the task of universities, if not unique then at least distinctive among all of the institutions that preserve and hand on past to future, is to preserve civilization and afford access to civilization. Ours is the task of remembering, recapitulating, reenacting. Ours is the task of reminding, in a very odd sense of the word: to regain mind. The stakes in universities and what they do therefore are not trivial; we do more than serve, carry out a more than transient or merely useful task. We preserve, but in a very special way: we show the generation to come the how of knowledge, not merely the what; we show in our time what humanity has done over all time to make sense of the world.

Lest these observations on the nature of knowledge, the danger of forgetting what we know, appear mere commonplace, let me point out alternative views. For I set forth a profoundly conservative theory of universities and their tasks, based on a deeply conservative premise of the character of civilization and society. I maintain that it is more difficult to keep what we have than to add to what we know. I very much take to heart Professor Ehrenfeld's warning that, if the few old men who know how to work the giant blocks of stone die without heirs, we shall no longer know how to build cathedrals, and, in time to come, when we see them, we shall not even know what they are, the way when we see the monstrous statues on Easter Island we do not know what they are. The failure of civilization looms large in my mind: we can lose what we have but get nothing better. Society defines what is at stake, and risking its slender goods for the main chance threatens utter chaos: "gone, not outdated, not superseded, not even controversial, not frivolous: a whole continent of important human knowledge gone"! Indeed, so far as civilization finds nourishment in knowledge and understanding — and I cannot define civilization without knowledge and understanding — there can be no greater catastrophe than that loss of a continent of human knowledge; that clod that washes out to sea is all the ground we ever had on which to make sense of something.

What, then, does the fact that humanity indeed can forget what it knows dictate for public policy in the here and now?

First, our principal task in universities must be the work of rigorous teaching. At stake in our classroom is the coming generation and its capacity to know and make sense of things. Therefore, our main effort should focus upon the how of learning, how our students grasp what we wish to tell them, the processes by which we turn information into useful knowledge, useful knowledge into understanding — all through (re)discovery, the recreation of intellect.

Second, the creation of new knowledge is less important than the recapitulation of received knowledge. Most professors most of the time in most universities know little about what it means to create new knowledge. It is estimated that two-thirds of all professors have published scarcely a line; of those who publish books, most publish one, few more than one, which means the discovery of new knowledge in the responsible form of a statement for the criticism of others ends with the dissertation; and, so I hear, 95 percent of all scholarly books come from perhaps 5 percent of the scholars. What this means is that most professors most of the time in most universities find themselves expected to do what few of them have ever done, and fewer still have done more than once. We must therefore reconsider the entire structure of higher education, and our task is to reframe our work in such a way that the work people really do — and want to do and often do supremely well — is valued, and that that work is done. Most professors should teach more than they now do; but they also should study more than they now do in order to teach what they themselves have made their own.

For I set forth a profoundly conservative theory of universities and their tasks, based on a deeply conservative premise of the character of civilization and society. I maintain that it is more difficult to keep what we have than to add to what we know.

Third, the recapitulation of received knowledge is not the same thing as the mere repetition of things people think they know, or have heard from others assumed to know what they are talking about. Teaching is now defined in some few, conventional ways. For example, the teacher talks, the students listen. The teacher is the authority, the students inert and passive respondents thereto. Or opinions are exchanged, so that none is the authority, and there is no task but to say what one thinks. Or students listen to professors

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but not to one another, and professors listen to no one but themselves, and writing lots of things down on paper is taken to demonstrate knowledge and understanding. But what if teaching is understood in other terms altogether, as engagement in a shared task of learning and understanding and explanation? What if teaching is a form of leading, by example—follow me! That is, to be sure, a risk-laden mode of teaching, and it is a way of teaching that fails much more often than it succeeds. For it makes the teacher into the model, the example, rather than the authority, and models or examples are there to be examined and criticized. That mode of teaching makes the classroom into a laboratory in which mental experiments are undertaken. Since, in this reading of the act of teaching, the professor turns out to be the guinea pig, my call is for us to play an unattractive role. But it is an honest one, and it is one that serves.

Fourth and last, if as I claim our task is to echo the natural sounds of knowledge that are knowledge, then some sounds will resonate, others not. Today we make a cacophony of noise; most of what we teach is mere facts, about this and that, and no theory instructs us on what takes precedence, and why some facts are trivial or merely particular. Entire areas of learning now turn out to be made up of an endless series of cases, such as the field of ethics. You can study journalistic ethics, medical ethics, legal ethics; you can raise money for professorships in all of these subjects, and you can make yourself into an expert on some area of ethics, medical ethics having attracted more than its share of failed careerists and bright-eyed opportunists. But these entrepreneurs of learning, trained in one thing so doctors of everything, make things up as they go along, for what sounds right is right; there is no theory of the thing they study, because there is no principled inquiry into the foundations of analysis and criticism. Yet we in the West have inherited a tradition of philosophical ethics that comes to us from the Greeks and a tradition of theological ethics that comes to us from ancient Israel through Christianity and Judaism; we have those theories, those principles of decision-making, that have laid the foundations for coherent thinking about a cogent subject. When a field can give only examples and cases, its casuistry attests to its intellectual bankruptcy. But the casuistry serves because philosophy is not learned, and, reinventing the wheel, the ethicists in the hospitals unwittingly teach a dreadful lesson indeed: what it means to lose what you've got.

So yes, humanity can forget what it knows, and the costs are there to see at Easter Island, or in the shelves of books we no longer can read but need to read, and in the areas of learning that are true and useful but no longer accessible. The task is not new knowledge but the reconsideration of knowledge. When we succeed—and we in universities are the only ones who can do the work—we shall hold on to what we have received, because we shall have made it our own. That is what I conceive to be the principal work of any generation: to make what has come to us as a gift into something that is our own, something that we too can use; in the case of learning, to make learning our own in such a way that we too can learn. ◈

Serum Sub Lumina Prima
(svet cvetova u svetla sveće)

by Peter Russell

Move softly, cold moonlight,—
Why disturb a stone?
Blood ran once in veins,
Bright the living zone,—
Life wherever is its own.

Often now the stream runs dry—
Pebbles catch crystal beams,
The torrents rush a stifled sigh,
Past is past and only seems.

What were once Enna's meadows,
Multicolored, dazzling, wide—
Now is but a waste of shadow,
Drooping leaves and buds too late,
Faded colours, petals dyed,
A world of flowers by candlelight,—
And dying embers in the grate.

—Translated by the author from his Serbo-Croatian original.

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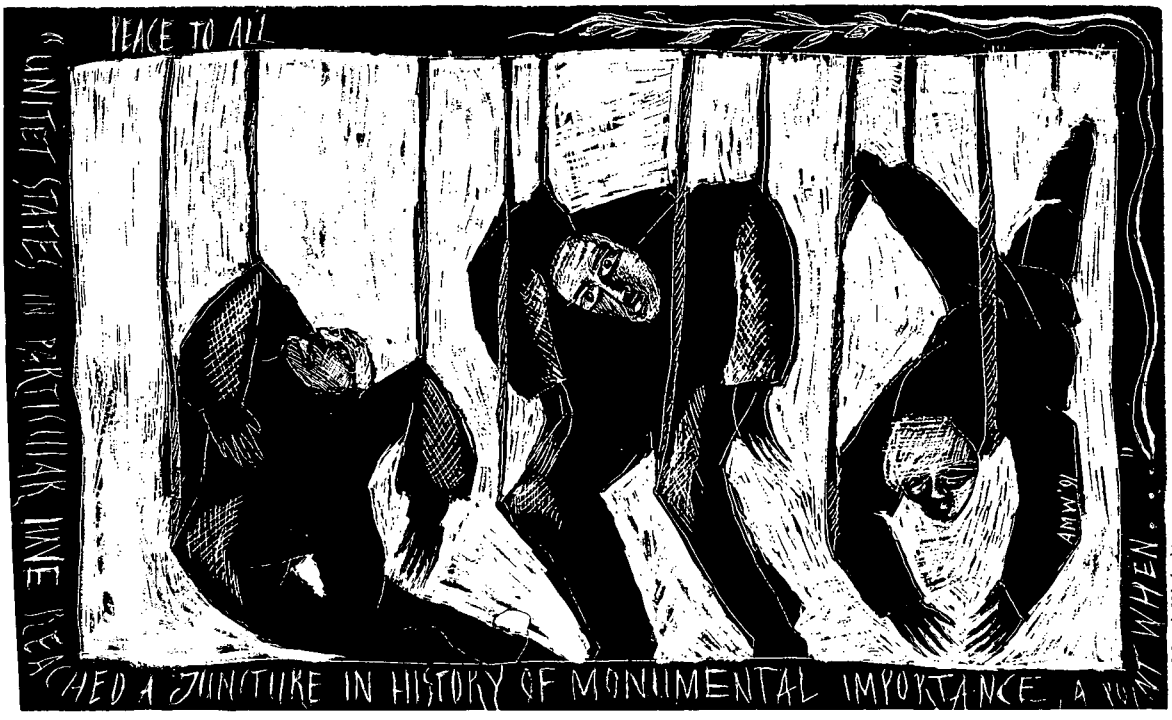
The New World Order

Just Another Form of Cultural Amnesia

by Theodore Pappas



Anna Mycek-Wodecki

Last September, in a speech about Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, President Bush used for the first time a phrase that has come to signify his foreign policy objectives and his vision of the post-Cold War age: "New World Order." Here and in subsequent speeches the President would hint that, with the liberation of Eastern Europe, the end of the Cold War, and the crumbling of Marxist-Leninist ideology, the world in general and the United States in particular have reached a juncture in history of monumental importance, a point when the "ground rules" could be laid for a new and more just international order with America paving the way and setting the example by doing "the hard work of freedom." The Persian Gulf War was the first "hard work" of the New World Order.

Bush's vision of the future and conception of the new order have not gone unchallenged, even among Beltway pundits and politicians. The *New Republic*'s Charles Krauthammer, for example, castigated President Bush last May for failing to bring the new order into sharp focus. The President had failed to find that catchy, memorable slogan or phrase that could serve as the principle around which the American people could rally, as when "Wilson invoked self-determination; FDR, Truman, and Kennedy, freedom; Carter, human rights; Reagan, democracy and democratic revolution." He argued that Bush's emphasis on keeping "the dangers of disorder at bay" was "too weak and passive an idea to deal with the crises of the post-Cold War world."

Mr. Krauthammer suggested that Bush adopt the idea of "sub-sovereignty," a concept the United States could use to lead the world to "a new world order that not just enforces rules but breaks old rules and makes new ones." Though it is difficult to imagine Americans fighting "to make the world safe for sub-sovereignty," Mr. Krauthammer believes this is the principle that could rally the country for a new world mission while satisfying "national groups seeking independence without fracturing the world." Simply put, he argues that it is possible for the United States to rewrite international law, if not remake the world in our own image, while at the same time remaining on the right, "correct" side of history. Mr. Krauthammer assumes (like many of his colleagues) that his readers understand how the possible disintegration of such multinational states as Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union constitutes a crisis for the people of these countries and regions as well as for the denizens of Boise and Des Moines. His argument is also indicative of the underlying premise of the entire new order: that it is not enough merely to believe in the right of self-determination or secession, for in the New World Order citizens have lost their liberty and independence and are now duty-bound to act transnationally on their convictions.

Senator Orrin Hatch registered his review of the New World Order's first year in a May editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*. The senator complained that Bush's conception of the new order has thus far failed to encompass enough, as in failing to set a "coherent political and military strategy to achieve the goal of national self-determination for Afghani-

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stan." And why should the United States want to meddle in Afghan affairs? The Afghans have "suffered more than the Kuwaitis and the Kurds combined."

Ah, there's the rub. Whether consciously or unconsciously, Senator Hatch had succeeded in uncovering the true significance of the Persian Gulf War: it is the precedent for all future U.S. action on behalf of the New World Order and the standard against which all future action will be judged. In other words, the United States is now morally obligated to come to the aid of any people whose crisis or misfortune, historical suffering or oppression is greater than the sum total of misery endured by the Kurds and Kuwaitis. Or as Senator Hatch put it, by not increasing our aid to the Afghan resistance, the United States runs "the risk of developing a moral tunnel vision that blinds us to the tragic fate of another people."

The ethnic strife between the Serbs and Croatians or Palestinians and Jews receives more press time and more presidential attention than the current tension and open warfare between Hispanic-Americans and blacks, and cars burning in Seoul, Johannesburg, or Jerusalem seem always to trump cars burning in D.C.

President Bush, however, is getting a bum rap. Despite the lamentations of Messrs. Krauthammer and Hatch, the New World Order is in excellent health. Look at the ever-expanding role of our military in world affairs and the varied hats our soldiers have worn since the Persian Gulf War began: they were the Defenders of Saudi Arabia, the Liberators of Kuwait, the Conquerors of Iraq, the Protectors of the Kurds, and even the Saviors of the Bangladeshis. And with Addis Ababa teetering on collapse, Indian democracy wallowing in blood, self-immolations smoldering in Seoul, and tanks ready to roll into Croatia and Slovenia, the opportunities for additional American military action abroad in the near future are endless.

There is virtually no job the American military will not now do on behalf of the New World Order. Once upon a time we thought an army was necessary to protect the homeland and deter aggressors; we were once even wary of the domestic repercussions of a standing army. America's New Armed Services of the New World Order, however, are busy abroad building villages, digging wells, clearing roads, distributing food, healing the sick, and policing the borders of countries thousands of miles away. Our military has upgraded its job description and will now be not merely a fighting force for hire, but will be all things to all people, a kind of armed synthesis of Oxfam, the Peace Corps, and the Salvation Army. It has, in essence, become the world's first international 911 — with a switchboard in Washington and Uncle Sam as the dispatcher. Messrs. Krauthammer and Hatch underestimate how hard our military is working "to be all it can be."

But there is a sounder, more visible indicator that the New World Order is right on track, and it is found in the form of nonverbal communication. In this age of media there is always a photograph or image that captures a significant historical moment and conveys its meaning more powerfully than words could ever do. The horrifying photograph of the Vietnamese child running and screaming in agony from the burning terror of napalm captured for a nation, for good or ill, the tragedy of war and the quagmire of Vietnam. The New World Order is no different. There is one scene in particular that has become common copy for our newspapers and news networks, and it is this: U.S. soldiers being greeted by hungry, destitute, or war-ravaged people with arms outstretched and eyes upturned in gratitude that their saviors have finally arrived.

This scene has been replayed many times this year, and each time the message is clear, the picture most telling, with only the geography and the troubled subjects varying the scene: the crying, spiritually broken Iraqi soldier crawling to the leg of his American captor, the jubilant Kuwaitis reaching up to touch the soldier-laden American tanks rolling into a liberated Kuwait City, hungry and homeless Kurds reaching to the heavens to catch the U.S. military assignments of food and supplies, the sick and battered Bangladeshis chanting *"faresta! faresta!"* — Bengali for "angel" — as the American military helicopters hover thunderously overhead. Frank Capra could have engineered no more moving and powerful pictures.

These are the scenes that Americans must learn to appreciate and enjoy if we are to secure our role in the New World Order. The United States could not play the commanding role in the new order without an endless supply of helpless people ready to accept our solicitude and ministrations. Our leaders are ever ready to clothe the naked, heal the sick, and bring freedom and peace to all people troubled and oppressed as long as the naked, sick, troubled, and oppressed reside outside the United States. The ethnic strife between the Serbs and Croatians or Palestinians and Jews receives more press time and more presidential attention than the current tension and open warfare between Hispanic-Americans and blacks, and cars burning in Seoul, Johannesburg, or Jerusalem seem always to trump cars burning in D.C.

Indeed, our leaders are so obsessed with the security, stability, and prosperity of every country and culture but their own that they are even willing to place the social and political interests of other nations above those of the United States. Anyone who disagrees with this policy is branded and portrayed as reckless, bigoted, dangerous, or insane. A case in point. Pat Buchanan (along with several *Chronicles* contributors) was recently attacked by a Canadian neoconservative in what the *Washington Post* describes as "the foam-flecked" *American Spectator*: "Who wouldn't be 'viscerally hostile,'" went the attack, "to a capital A, capital F, 'America First' policy"?

Kipling told the British to take up the White Man's Burden, but it never really was a "burden" at all. In fact, feeding and schooling the natives was the best justification for the old world order otherwise known as colonialism, a euphemism for imperialism. Which leads us to where Mr. Krauthammer errs. He takes President Bush too literally and

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unnecessarily demands focus and specificity for the new order. The New World Order is not, never has been, and never will be about self-determination or sub-sovereignty or about the exercise and propagation of grand schemes or specific doctrines; it is instead—simply and boldly—about the exercise of will and the propagation of American hegemony. It is about power, not principle, and in particular about the power to play Julius Caesar abroad while playing Nero amidst a burning Rome at home.

But there is a private as well as a public side to the New World Order. In addition to the exercise of public power for the propagation of American influence and control, there exists a dimension to the New World Order that involves the exercise of private power for personal gain, as Bob Feldman's exposé on "The Kissinger Affair" in the New York publication *Downtown* alleged last March. According to Mr. Feldman, Mr. Kissinger's "international consulting firm" called Kissinger Associates—which according to an April 26, 1986, article in the *New York Times Magazine* peddles influence and access to high government officials for between $150,000 and $420,000, fees which surely have risen in the five years since the article appeared—has (or has recently had) among its clients the Fluor Corporation, which received a substantial oil contract from Saudi Arabia shortly before Iraq's August 2 invasion of Kuwait, and the Kuwaiti government-owned Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, whose oil drilling had been suspended because of the Iraqi invasion. The Kissinger consultant working with the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation in the 1980's was reportedly President Bush's National Security Adviser throughout the Persian Gulf War, General Brent Scowcroft, who is reported to have been on the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation's payroll from at least 1984 to 1986. Mr. Feldman says that it was also during this time that General Scowcroft became a director of Santa Fe International, shortly after it was purchased by the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation in 1981. The question all this leads to was succinctly posed by Murray Rothbard in the May 1991 *Rothbard-Rockwell Report*: "Is it a coincidence that it was Scowcroft's National Security Council presentation of August 3, 1990, which, according to the *New York Times* (February 21) 'crystallized people's thinking and galvanized support' for a 'strong response' to the Iraq invasion of Kuwait?"

Suzanne McFarlane, Henry Kissinger's executive assistant, told me in a phone conversation that Kissinger Associates has "never," either before or after the August 2 invasion, had a Kuwaiti client. Where are all the Woodwards and Bernsteins when you really need them?

We do know, however, that Henry Kissinger serves on President Bush's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, which gives him access to classified information, and that General Scowcroft has recently held stock in a number of defense-related companies. He sold these holdings shortly before the Persian Gulf War began, including shares in General Electric, which Scowcroft valued at some $1 million, and stock valued at $50,000 in DBA Systems Inc., a Florida-based military contractor of which Mr. Scowcroft was a director before he joined the Bush administration. Under the ethics law governmental officials with ties to military contractors are barred from participating in matters of national security. To circumvent any possible legal difficulties, President Bush—the "ethics President"—had granted Mr. Scowcroft a waiver that enabled him to participate in national security issues despite his military-related holdings. Representative Henry Gonzalez (D-Texas), chairman of the House Banking Committee, began to investigate this situation last June. He even wrote a letter to President Bush, saying that he was "deeply concerned" about Kissinger's influence and "especially troubled" by Scowcroft's involvement in policymaking that could possibly benefit him financially.

We also know that Kuwait's biggest cheerleader was not President Bush or Congress, but rather America's preeminent public-relations firm, Hill & Knowlton, which a group of wealthy Kuwaitis hired at the cost of $11 million for a few months' work. It was H & K that created "Citizens for a Free Kuwait," the organization that conducted show-and-tell presentations before the Human Rights and Foreign Affairs committees of the House of Representatives and that arranged for members of Amnesty International and Middle East Watch to give detailed testimonies before Congress as to alleged Iraqi atrocities—the most noted being the one President Bush himself proselytized, that Iraqi soldiers allowed 312 babies to die after removing them from their incubators in Kuwaiti hospitals, a story we now know to be an utter fabrication for propaganda purposes. H & K even pulled off the unprecedented feat of conducting both morning and afternoon shows before the Security Council of the United Nations. As Arthur Rowse asked in the May *Progressive*, "How could a public-relations firm, acting at a moment of acute international crisis, turn the world's principal deliberative body into an all-day sounding board for one of its wealthy clients?" Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that the president and chief operating officer of H & K was Craig Fuller, who had served as chief of staff to Vice President Bush, and that the head of H & K's U.S. division is Robert Gray, who had been inaugural co-chair for the first Reagan-Bush administration.

In 1917 Woodrow Wilson sent American boys off to die for the sake of democracy. By the 1920's, however, it was clear to many Americans that the motives for our participation in World War I were more complicated. Ethnic antagonisms played a part, but so did the desire for profits. Americans did not blindly believe all the scare stories recounted in the muckraking *Merchants of Death* and later revived in the hearings conducted by Senator Gerald Nye, but they did know that Wilson's argument for democracy was backed by individuals who did well out of the war.

We knew this once, and then forgot it. The political class of the United States knows how to make good use of the pernicious amnesia that is so characteristic of democracy. Perhaps it is time for another Nye Committee to shake its confidence. ◈

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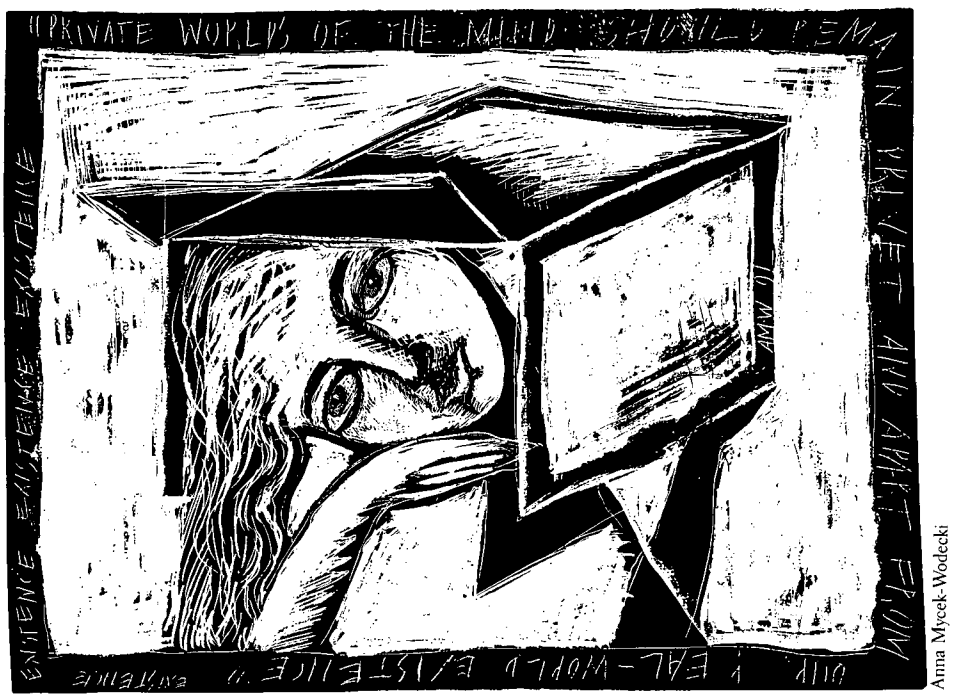
The Private Worlds of the Mind

by Anthony Harrigan



Anna Mycek-Wodecki

On the morning of July 13, 1985, as I noted in my journal, I woke with an exceptionally clear recollection of a dream. In it my wife, Elizabeth, and I were in a high-ceilinged Victorian room with brown walls fashioned of rotating metallic discs. From there, we moved outside onto New York City's Park Avenue, where a group of elderly men were gathered for what seemed to be a parade. However, in a minute, most of them moved away. Elizabeth and I remained there, atop a steep hill, looking down on 34th Street and other city streets below. Up the hill (was it Murray Hill, which I remembered from a visit to the old Murray Hill Hotel in 1946?) marched a company of soldiers in World War I uniforms. They wore bright green sashes across their chests in the manner of certain Civil War regiments. We had a panoramic view of what appeared to be the old Pennsylvania Railroad Station, which I was familiar with in my youth. The railroad station and the cityscape were bathed in an eerie green light. There was snow on the ground.

This is one type of private world—a fantasy world—that everyone knows at one time or another. From birth to death, we are constantly shaping and reshaping our visions of the world, creating worlds inside our heads. We do this even as we proceed with our normal daily activities, in a purposeful fashioning of an overall image of the various worlds that confront us or impinge on us, in daydreams and reveries, in dreams at night and in memory.

Loren Eiseley describes the power behind the cosmos this way: "It makes in fact all of the innumerable and private worlds which exist in the minds of men." All too often we ignore these private worlds, which all of us know, and think only of the shared public world. The real world is always with us, to be sure, but it is subjected to private interpretation and conceptualization. Indeed, the real world is different for everyone. Consider the world of human relationships. They can't be fully described in any objective way apart from the observer. The relationship of parent to child, child to parent, family members each to the other, friends to friends, and stranger to stranger are rarely identical. The individual sees every other human being in a special context; each individual exists in his and others' frameworks of relationships or, in some cases, becomes virtually invisible. Relationships aren't necessarily reciprocal or equal.

One of the strangest capacities of the human being is his ability in dreams to put real people in situations that are fictional, utilizing their known characters while giving them applications that have nothing to do with their real lives, as in the case of a dream I had that involved two good friends from different parts of the country and different social worlds. It was an intelligence-caper type situation in Nazi-occupied Europe. Pondering this sort of thing, one is bound to ask: what led to this peculiar dream scenario, which had nothing to do with the real life experiences of the individuals involved, even though they looked and acted in ways that

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were generally true to life?

In considering dreams and reveries, one realizes that our private amnesias are never permanent or complete, that nothing is truly lost to the human mind, though it is often difficult to access the distant past or even recent experience. Every minute of every hour of every year is stoked with impressions of people and things, places, nature, spiritual and intellectual experience. Every datum, every thought or fleeting impression is stored in the brain and available for use as a block to build a private world. Of course, the greater part of the material in the library of the mind is never used.

As I noted in my journal for a February day in 1979, I once again experienced a special world while taking a mid-morning walk on the beach near my home on Kiawah Island in South Carolina. A strong wind was blowing across the strand, but I was warm, as I was wearing a Navy aviator's coat with a thick lining and a fur collar. It was a marvelous, sunlit winter day. I had the beach to myself, except for the shore birds. I sat down on the cold sand along the duneline, relishing the quiet, the natural beauty, and the soothing isolation. I took off my shoes and socks, rolled up my trousers, and walked in the gullies and the edge of the surf. The icy water produced a pleasant tingling sensation. It was a perfect day, no past and no future. It was as though time had stopped and I was alone in the world. Yet I didn't feel lonely or in need of anyone or anything. That may be what it feels like when one transcends time—in eternity. The perfection of the world was all around me; it was completely undisturbed. I was beyond worry, discomfort, or disturbance.

The Kiawah experience belonged to a different type of private world. It was evidence of a real-life experience of living on an island and of my fondness for that type of quiet, isolated existence. The Kiawah experience also had in it an echo of my liking for a truly remarkable American book, *The Outermost House*, which tells of a year spent in an old cottage on Cape Cod in the 1920's, long before there was any crowding or spoilation on the Cape.

Not all these worlds are painless; for example, our childhoods may have been painful experiences, and revisiting these worlds can be traumatic. But there are also youthful, private worlds that have a mixed character, worlds in which sadness and happiness are in equilibrium, as when I recall the private worlds of my summers in the half-dozen years after my father's death—the early morning ritual of opening the stained glass front door of my family's old house on Schroon Lake in New York's Adirondack Mountains, and walking out on the porch to sit on the front steps next to geranium-filled flower boxes and to watch the sun playing on the waves a hundred feet in front of the house; it was a private world of stillness and profound peace. On those mornings I was keenly aware of my personal loss. Next to me was the outline of a large fish that my late father had cut into the floorboards, a sign of the presence that had been removed from us. Those peaceful mornings helped me tolerate my loss and accept an emptied world to a degree sufficient for me to function.

The relationships of childhood often fix in our minds and form the basic structure of our lives. Until my father's death, my world was totally secure. I never heard an angry word in the home in which I grew up, and love and unity characterized my family. It was an extended family in the sense that our servants—immigrants from Scotland, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, and Slovakia—were integral parts of the family and, hence, of *my* world. To this day I think of them and pray for them each day. Of course, whereas *my* childhood world was secure, it was not entirely so for the servants in my parents' employ. Though treated with consideration, they were subject to economic uncertainty. My sister's nurse, Louise, who sought to keep my sister an infant, had to leave when her methods became intolerable, though we kept in touch with her for the rest of her life. My Scottish nurse, Maggie, had to seek another position when it came time for me to have a governess. Our chauffeur, Anderson, returned to Sweden when my father's death and the onset of the Depression made it impossible for us to employ a chauffeur or even keep a car. All this means that my private world of childhood did not correspond completely with the private worlds of the servants in my family.

As one grows, one's private worlds multiply and become more extensive. Every year, every new place, every evolving network of relationships—school, college, young adulthood, marriage, parenthood and even grandparenthood—opens new private worlds of the mind. In this context, older private worlds may be reshaped to be made consistent with the experience of maturity. But one still never loses touch with the private worlds of yesteryear. One may enter them at any time and recapture their existential quality and even come to realize that there are many mansions in the house of time. And it is even possible to focus on a single private world, one niche in time, while largely ignoring the contemporary public world.

In considering dreams and reveries, one realizes that our private amnesias are never permanent or complete, that nothing is truly lost to the human mind.

Both dreams and serious thought about different modes and forms of existence, such as the reverie on the winter beach, are reminders of the potential of human existence. Time prevents us from following all of life's paths, but imagination can take us where we otherwise could not go. Private worlds of the mind suggest new and untried avenues; they establish and impose unanticipated new networks on our daily existence. If we understood this better, we would appreciate the fact that we live in and with a field of relationships—with family, friends, work associates, and strangers, all of whom are part of our personal landscape. Each figure in this landscape has his own landscape that relates to but isn't necessarily part of ours, and the points of reference on his landscape are different.

Our access to private worlds enables us to transcend time to an important degree. Even as one approaches old age, it is possible to experience the zest and excitement of thirty years past, and to see one's friends as they were in earlier decades.

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Thus the pleasurable world of the mid-to-late 1950's comes alive for me as I remember such things as the parties given by my friend McColl Pringle in his family's old house on South Battery in Charleston, in 1957. I can envision the crowds of friends who danced in the ballroom, the color of the girls' evening dresses, and the sound of rock-and-roll in its first phase — songs such as "Behind the Green Door," to which I danced with my wife.

This recollection — this private world — is much more than a fleeting memory. I recall the whole world in association with a period and a group of friends. The dances that I see with my mind's eye, the feeling of being transported into a vanished era, are part of a world that exists in rich detail and variety — parties on Louis Green's yacht in Charleston Harbor, a day at Billy Coleman's country place on Wadmalaw Island, Sunday afternoon gatherings at Bob and Mary Hagerty's Sullivan Island place with its antique private railroad car under a shed, an evening harbor trip in Aussie Smythe's Boston whaler. This seemingly lost world isn't lost at all — it can be retrieved and relived as a private world of the mind.

The smallest, most remote causal connection can open the mind to a private world often submerged under the exigencies of the real-life public world. The retrieval is occasioned by a bar of music, a taste of food or drink, a line in a book — the number of keys is myriad. One may recognize such keys as music associated with certain events or people, but the mind is full of many types of keys. One cannot begin to fathom the complexity of the trigger mechanism that prompts thoughts, recollections, and mental constructions. David Plante, writing of such triggers in an article in the *New Yorker*, has said, "I am drawn to objects of history. I love having on my desk, on shelves, in drawers so that I come across them unexpectedly, the handle of an amphora, a rusty key, a shell casing — stilled moments but moments that if they were put into motion by proper study would expand into years, decades, centuries." In other words, these objects unlock his private worlds.

We can create private worlds in a vast number of areas. We can bring alive in our mind the world of Stonehenge, of the Great Depression, the Italian Renaissance, or the antebellum American South. Obviously, the knowledge we acquire in life, our reading and historical speculation, helps us to develop a transcendence that is manifested in the acquisition of extraordinary private worlds. But even the man or woman with little knowledge of other historical eras and types of human existence can open private worlds that he or she has a lifetime to explore.

Great writers are explorers of the private universe. One thinks of Henry Thoreau at Walden Pond. His time in that isolated spot enabled him to develop his unique perspective and idiom. From ancient times to the modern era — from St. Augustine to Santayana — there have been writers who discover new worlds to explore in the human mind. In reading them, we realize that there is much more to reality than the utilitarian comprehends. Indeed, as we penetrate the inner life of the mind, we may conclude that knowledge of private worlds is one of the greatest discoveries in life, as when we encounter writers who truly wake us to another dimension of meaning. Stephen Jay Gould once said of listening to a great German scholar, "I sat spellbound as wave after wave of expanded meaning cascaded over me." James Webb, the novelist and former Navy secretary, reminds us that the duty of a writer is "to study human nature, to study the human condition." He says that "The orientation for introspection is the chief benefit for writing."

Painters as well as writers create and explore private worlds of the mind, no one more so than Hieronymus Bosch. The 16th-century master compels attention today, as he did in his own time, with his bizarre and terrifying masterpieces. His chilling visions are of demons, monsters, and unspeakable cruelties. His world is a world of horrible punishments. This vision was drawn from medieval folklore, with the rat as a symbol of filth and the mussel shell of infidelity being familiar to the people of his time. His art — his interior world — was in keeping with an era of violence, disorder, pestilence, and pessimism.

As one enters the private worlds of the mind — what Professor Peter Heidtman of Ohio University once referred to as "the metaphorically vast inner region" — one may become a somewhat lonely explorer. One may even become, as one critic has said of Loren Eiseley, "a solitary fugitive from the 20th century," from its worst manifestations, at any rate — the time pressures, the homogenization of culture, the hectic quality of existence, and the trivialization of so much of life. These facts of modern life contribute to the breakdown of loyalties, bonds, allegiances, and the sense of community essential to a civilized existence. Hence the desire on the part of many thoughtful people for a measure of isolation, or at least quiet.

For most people, our private worlds do not constitute a place to hole up; they are instead a kind of bounty provided by our mental existence. They are enriching and proof of the spaciousness of our total being. They represent what Eiseley called the "enormous extension of vision of which life is capable." Our dreams enable us to project our innermost concerns and attitudes into half-factual, half-fictional worlds, composites that provide clues to our deepest feelings and intuition. We learn from these private worlds, from these mental constructions and remembrances of the complexity of existence and of the extraordinarily numerous points of reference in life. We hear voices and imagine situations that we would not heed or come across in the workaday world of nonimaginative contacts.

To be sure, the private world of the mind can overtake consciousness so that there is a serious disconnection with the real world. Such is the world of the psychotic or near-psychotic individual. Others, who are almost overwhelmed by private worlds of the mind, may continue to live in a normal community but may experience visions and fears that gravely impair their lives. The autistic child lives in such a private world, a world sealed off from the real one; he has great difficulty breaking out of it and communicating or showing affection.

Whether there is a subterranean domain of ancestral memories that we draw on in our private worlds is a question that has engaged great thinkers for many years. The work of Carl Jung deals with what he describes as the archetypes of a collective unconscious. And Dr. Alexis Carrel, the great medical scientist, wrote in *Man, The Unknown* in 1935 that certain activities of consciousness seem to travel over space

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and time. He said that man is not wholly comprised of the physical continuum, noting that "clairvoyants may detect hidden things at great distance. Some of them perceive events which have already happened or which will take place in the future."

For my part, I believe there is a ghostly kingdom of the mind that we are in contact with but cannot truly comprehend. The human mind seems to be full of echoes of sounds made long ago, scenes that are beyond the limits of our travel or reading. The concoctions of the brain sometimes seem to be based on experiences that are completely beyond memory or artful construction, as though we had tapped an ancient reservoir of vision and feeling. Have they surfaced from some unknown past? The question must occur to many people. Experiences we do not recognize seem to speak to us from afar. I have often wondered whether I hear the voices of ancestors calling out to me when I respond to a situation in a particular way, a way that seems to have been ordained long ago. This is all a part of a mystery that we shan't unravel, the enigma of the potential of the human mind. These archetypes ought not to be seen as a dark or sinister side of the brain, but rather as thrilling evidence of the way our ordinary real-life world is enhanced.

As we ponder the existence and proliferation of these private worlds, we are compelled to ask: what drives human beings? How many of our choices and actions are decided by these other worlds inside us, the worlds apart from reasoned consideration of decisions? Rosaline Shevach Diamant observed in the May 1988 *Atlantic* that "human beings are the only species that can elaborate mental processes called fantasies into the intricate mental structures that enable us to organize our lives." A danger that we sometimes face is that what we regard as pragmatic decision-making has its roots in fantasy, in the private worlds of the mind that should remain private and apart from our real-world existence.

The past, therefore, has never really been abolished, and we may even have openings into the future through our explorations of these private worlds—private worlds that enrich our lives by adding to the wonder of human existence.

Le Trucheman Des Boulimies

by Peter Russell

Her face dawns through the jet of tresses
Like a white sail coming into view
In ebony clouds of night's seascape.
First glimpse of her beauty is born in pain,
A storm of sobs, a rain of tears.
Black jonquil drenches a petulant rose,
All other beauties in her shadow quenched.
Thought itself denigrates the order of her perfection.
Thought is a coarse seine for catching sparks.
How can such subtlety be netted
In the crude mesh of the eye?
Persisting marvel escapes the lattice of thought,
In eyes' diapositive cannot be caught.
She is above description. Each attempt
Circumscribes not her but her descriptions'
Pale. If someone, intent on a more profound study,
Would lower his sight and talk
In the natural Sanskrit of ordinary love
Science would sprout from delight and the eye
Change to a jonquil gifted with sight.
Others, blind scholars, will think about it
And do nothing. People think that the Shaykh
Should work miracles and have illuminations.
What's needed in the teacher is only
That he be possessed of the pupils' need.

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Business as Usual

by Frank Brownlow

"The effects of infantile instruction are, like those of syphilis, never completely cured."
—Robert Briffault

Anna Mycek-Wodecki

Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus
by Dinesh D'Souza
New York: The Free Press;
319 pp., $19.95

◆

Shortly before Christmas last, I heard a college president say, gesturing toward a copy of Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals*, "That book is making my job very difficult." Evidently, the anti-academic barrage that began in earnest with Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* is having an effect. Here in Massachusetts another sign of the academic times is that Michael Dukakis, on his way out of the statehouse, stripped the state's universities of money with virtually no protest at all from the general public.

What began as a theme of the conservative press has been taken up by nearly everyone, and during the past year the folly, corruption, and sheer weirdness to be found in contemporary academic life have become stock topics of every kind of journalism. Academics now approach news magazines as if they were booby-trapped. A Smith College professor told me that when he read *Time*'s last article on the subject, and found it did *not* mention Smith, he almost perspired with relief. Add to a hostile press the effects of a recession and a dwindling number of applicants, and it appears that these are hard times for academia.

Illiberal Education, therefore, appeared this past spring to a well-prepared audience. Much of its content, based on the reportage of the last few years, is familiar, its shock value dissipated. Most readers could make a fair guess at the contents from the title alone: preferential admission by race, represented by Berkeley's treatment of its Asian applicants; the dismantling of the humanities curriculum at Stanford; speech and thought police at Michigan, Harvard, and elsewhere; postmodernist criticism at Duke, and Afrocentrism at Howard. Even many of the characters are familiar. Academic affairs have become such a topic of news that one continually reads D'Souza in the context of more up-to-date disclosures. For instance, allegations of financial corruption at Stanford provide a less idyllic background to the curricular wars there than D'Souza describes. And D'Souza's amusing account of Stanley Fish, the cheery postmodernist entrepreneur of Duke, is enriched for the reader who knows about the professor's assault on the National Association of Scholars as racist, sexist, and homophobic—and as a threat to his own well-watered turf.

D'Souza's thesis is that America's campuses are the scene of a "victim's revolution" that aims to replace an older order described as white, male, elitist, Eurocentric, racist, *et cetera*, with a new one based on racial and cultural diversity, hospitable to the nonwhite, the female, and the homosexual. His book is mostly about the means by which the revolution's devotees advance the cause. Speech in any

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way critical of women, homosexuals, and minorities is strongly disapproved. The major works of the European literary tradition are tolerated only as examples of "the discourse of oppression." Considerations of race and sex dominate admissions and appointments. And so it goes on, documented in detail by D'Souza, who makes it clear that his examples are representative, not exhaustive, and that for every case mentioned hundreds have gone unrecorded.

The result, according to D'Souza, is that where the revolution has succeeded, its effects are disastrous. Favoritism of minorities enrages the majority, and worsens relations between the races. Lowered standards of matriculation and graduation embitter supposed beneficiaries. The assault on academic standards in the name of politics demoralizes entire universities.

Is D'Souza right? The strength of his book is in its narration of detail and its presentation of individuals. Case by case he presents a picture of the American campus that would be profoundly depressing were it not for the hilarious procession of charlatans, buffoons, and poltroons that trots through his pages to cheer up the reader. Under the protection of race and sex, it seems, people talk and act quite without inhibition: for instance, a dean of minority affairs denounces dining-hall workers because the nostalgia behind their "back to the fifties party" indicates sympathy for a segregationist decade; a professor of business tells us that "all rules are unjust," and a historian renames his course "Cowpersons and Native Americans."

The book's weakness is its conceptual frame. If this is a victims' revolution, why does it proceed, as D'Souza says, quoting Donald Kagan at Yale, "from the top down"? Why, moreover, has it proved so profitable for the academic profession? The last decade has seen boom times in academia; immense sums have flowed from the government and the foundations into institutional and individual pockets, and in the humanities and social sciences much of it has financed various aspects of D'Souza's revolution. D'Souza does not explain this. As he says, the makeup of the nation's population is changing, as are its social habits; but there is no necessary relationship of cause and effect between the observation and the state of academic affairs that he describes.

If one extends the book's journalistic focus beyond the few years it covers, then things presented as brand new look more familiar. The new illiberals regard the university as an agent of social and political change, but what is new about that? People who are grumbling now cheered thirty years ago when John Kennedy used the steps of the Michigan Union to announce the founding of the Peace Corps. Modifying the curriculum to suit different kinds of students also has a long history. Where else did all those creative writing courses come from, not to mention Freshman English itself? And if we are to talk about academic qualifications, how is the average self-ordained poet or novelist qualified to teach on a college campus?

Whatever aspect of the new illiberalism one considers, it has an academic history. Intolerance? There were once two notoriously conservative English professors at Michigan, and the liberal wits of that department treated them as pariahs: academic conservatives learned long ago the trick of self-censorship that their liberal colleagues are now complaining about.

Lowered standards? Preferential admissions for nonacademic reasons? They are not new. In the 70's, David Truman, president of Mount Holyoke, told faculty members worried about admissions that the high standards of the late 60's were abnormal. For a few years an oversupply of matriculants allowed colleges to be choosy. Now, as institutions struggle to maintain the high numbers of the 60's, things are back to normal, but with this difference: there is such a surplus of places that unqualified students are admitted everywhere (with catastrophically demoralizing effects on the high schools), and preferential admission is being given to members of racial minorities instead of alumni children and the offspring of Protestant clergymen. The minority population, however, is not the only source of unqualified students. It is not even the major one. It is merely the most visible, and the one that suffers most, from kindergarten up, from lowered standards.

Similarly, although the crackpot theories and low standards associated with Black Studies and Women's Studies are fair game, it is hypocritical to treat them as an unprecedented attack on the academic citadel. As a professor of philosophy said when asked why her college, a famous one, had introduced Black Studies: "We let the social scientists in sixty years ago, and we haven't had a leg to stand on since." Complaints about bogus subjects, gut courses, and lowered standards come strangely from the beneficiaries of a system that rewards Freudian critics of literature, funds chairs in outdoor recreation, and always ensures a sufficiency of courses passable by the less than bright. Besides, there is nothing intrinsically fatuous about Black or Women's Studies; both are rewarding fields for scholars duly grounded in literature, philology, and history.

What is new is that this transference of privilege is mandated by the administrative managers, and affects just about every academic and administrative department. It has a totalitarian smell about it. Affirmative action committees have veto power over appointments, hence over curriculum and standards. As for the faculty involved in these power games, they are pawns, in some cases willing pawns, in others rich pawns, but pawns nonetheless. The involvement of a few genuine Marxists and radicals seems coincidental. But have the institutions themselves and the values they represent really changed? D'Souza's victims' revolution looks to me like an unusually virulent manifestation of the anti-intellectualism that has been endemic in higher education for a long time. The movement takes a left-wing direction because, ever since higher education became subordinate to state planning after the 1939-1945 war, left-wing sympathies have been profitable and conventional in academia. Unfortunately, the left is nature's wrecker: when these people walk down a street, the buildings fall down behind them. Yet even so, leftism in itself is not incompatible with high academic standards, and it remains to be seen whether the right-wing orchestra we hear tuning up in the wings will play a more spiritual kind of music.

The universities' anti-intellectualism makes them vulnerable to political and other influences, but it is not caused by them. The odd truth is that higher

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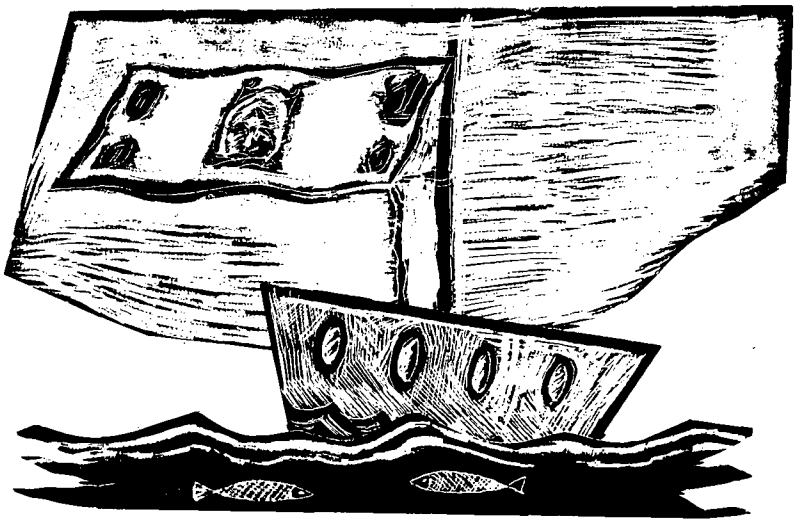
education is not interested in high standards. Higher education occasionally tolerates and sometimes even rewards scholarship, intellectual curiosity, and good teaching, but only after more important things are taken care of. These include filling the beds, increasing the cash flow, and lobbying the legislature. Scholar-teachers are the sacred totems or icons of the system, to be trotted out for the edification of donors, parents, and the average faculty member. The university's real interests lie elsewhere. I learned this from a distinguished papyrologist in the classics department of a major university. This man, who ate many a reluctant but free meal in the process of being paraded before the dean's guests, was recommended for a distinguished professorship just before he retired. Had it come ten or fifteen years earlier, he said, it would have meant a great deal; as it was, he knew pretty well where his work stood in the university's scheme of priorities.

Higher education in America has become a system of virtually uniform institutions serving a mass clientele, and increasingly devoted to the proposition that a perfect world is one made safe, comfortable, and profitable for mediocrity. The subversion of educational standards is dangerous to America's long-run prosperity and happiness, but it is essential to the short-run prosperity of higher education. One could even argue that institutions that spend at most about 25-30 percent of their cash flow on education are not really schools at all: they are holding companies, phone companies, real-estate investment companies, hotels, social service agencies, research and fundraising offices. In that context, "affirmative action" is the latest and most powerful of a series of weapons deployed in higher education's war on intelligence and integrity; "cultural diversity" is an economic concept that defines one aspect of the future the universities think they are investing in. One of D'Souza's most engaging characters, Vice-provost Gillis of Duke, more or less told him so; but D'Souza seems not to have taken him seriously.

For some five years, under cover of doing good to the world's wounded, the myriad nerds of academe have been enjoying sweet revenge for every injury inflicted on their fragile self-esteem by the very idea of academic distinction. Now there are signs—the success of D'Souza's book is one of them—that this latest campaign to subvert academic standards is overreaching itself. One should not, however, expect an academic renaissance: intellectual subversion has more forms than one, and the denizens of academe are gifted inventors of them. Meanwhile, rhetoric upon the place of the humanities in the curriculum is less useful in grasping the significance of D'Souza's data than some apothegms of the marketplace, such as, "If you subsidize a thing, you're going to get it." D'Souza's cast of characters consists mostly of people whom America has rewarded well with prestige and money. Someone is satisfied. But then, as someone else said, "No one ever went broke underestimating the taste of the American people," and contemporary academia spends its days in that kind of estimation. ◈

BRIEF MENTIONS



WHAT HAS GOVERNMENT DONE TO OUR MONEY?
by Murray N. Rothbard
Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute; 119 pp., $5.00

Murray Rothbard, according to his enemies, is no economist, because he is not a rigorous scientist. Rothbard ought to take that as a compliment. Whatever else economics is, it is not the "dismal science." It is not a science at all, except in the sense that all forms of systematic humane learning (*e.g.*, theology, grammar) are sciences, and its practitioners are for the most part conceited optimists, whose ignorance of history, literature, and philosophy render them incapable of learning anything even from their own experience. An argument with an economist usually begins with the "layman" saying something obvious about the uniqueness of mother love or the importance of wilderness, only to have the economist shoot back with something about different people "maximizing utility" in different ways—as if such statements actually meant something. Economists are like sheep dogs: they are very good at handling their assigned tasks, so long as they never get the idea that they're in charge. When a dog makes that mistake, he begins to eat the sheep.

Murray Rothbard is no rogue economist, subordinating human concerns to economic calculation. He has always been a historian and, above all, a moralist whose obsession with human liberty has made him enemies across the political spectrum. His little book on money, first published in 1963, provides a clear and entertaining account of money and banking from the perspective of the Austrian school, as well as a nutshell history of American monetary policy. Rothbard is learned but never pedantic, simple without ever trivializing his complicated subject. The book has converted many of the most skeptical readers to the doctrine of hard money and ought to be put in the hands of every present and potential voter in the United States. If that sounds too much like coercion, then order the book.

—*Thomas Fleming*

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Credulous Creatures

by Jack D. Douglas

"If the world will be gulled, let it be gulled."

—Robert Burton

Anna Mycek-Wodecki

Kinsey, Sex and Fraud: The Indoctrination of a People
by Judith A. Reisman and Edward W. Eichel
Edited by J. Gordon Muir and John H. Court
Lafayette, Louisiana: Huntington House; 256 pp., $19.95

◆

Who now reads Alfred Kinsey? Almost no one. Who now remembers the great media event set off in 1948 by the publication of his "monumental" book of 804 pages on *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*? Most Americans over 40 probably do, while most under 40 probably do not. Few college students today recognize the name, unless they have just had to pass a multiple-choice exam in Sex and Society 101.

Kinsey was not one of the *conquistadores* of sexology, among a pantheon of modernist cultural heroes who led the conquest of two eons of Christian tradition; he seems to have seen himself as a humble statistician documenting the thunderous truths of the Marquis de Sade, Krafft-Ebing, Freud, Ellis, Sanger, Malinowski, Mead, and others. By trade, Kinsey was an entomologist whose forte was the meticulous counting of specimens and items of behavior. His calling was the use of this trade to "mop up" the lingering traces of Victorian hypocrisy by burying them in an avalanche of statistics about the sexual behavior of twelve thousand men, boys, and babies.

Kinsey was well aware that his statistics were only the *ne plus ultra* of many decades of interviews, questionnaires, compilations, and analyses by many sexologists. But he also knew that, in an age of bureaucratic official information and technocratic journalists, a mountain of arcane numbers buried in myriad analyses would pulverize any public criticisms of the new faith of sexual liberation. Just as fifth-century Christians used their celibacy as a breastplate of Christian righteousness to humiliate their pagan enemies, so Kinsey used statistics as his scientific breastplate of righteousness to humiliate his Christian and scientific opponents with "proof" of rampant hypocrisy.

Stripped of all its complexities, Kinsey's argument was a bald assertion that "scientific statistics" on these twelve thousand men (soon to be followed by a supporting cast of eight thousand females exposed in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*) "proved" that Americans were secretly committing a lot of sexual sins that they publicly denounced. The undeclared conclusion of his work was that this proof of hypocrisy also proved that the Christian tradition of sex confined to marriage was wrong, and therefore should be abandoned in favor of sexual liberation—that is, casual sex of whatever polymorphously perverse form fits one's fancy at the moment, be it animalism or Romantic Passion.

Though almost all the details of Kinsey's work have now been forgotten even by sexologists, that work did much to advance his calling in precisely the ways he anticipated. My review of a small sample of major texts on sex, marriage, and family shows that they still routinely refer to Kinsey's great impact through the mass media in the 1950's. No single work that I know of has noted the obvious facts that no one, least of all Christians, ever doubted that deviant sex and hypocrisy were rampant, and that ministers routinely advanced this fact as evidence of the need for Christianity. When the Great Spirit of an age decrees the triumph of a Great Myth, no amount of common

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sense or obvious facts will stop it, as Hegel might have noted. For whatever reasons, the Great American Spirit had decided in favor of sexual modernism, and Kinsey's "scientific statistics" struck a mighty media blow on its behalf.

The crucial point of *Kinsey, Sex and Fraud* is that Kinsey's statistics were not valid or reliable statistics, but were largely factoids (that in some instances may have been collected in criminal ways) used to defraud the public. The authors do a good job of pulling together the scholarly facts, which show that the statistics upon which *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* are based were collected from a very biased sample, with great overrepresentations of prisoners and other subpopulations known by everyone to be, of all people, the most casual and deviant in their sexual practices. They also show that these biases were largely hidden or declared insignificant in the labyrinthine analyses of the book, and then largely forgotten by later generations of sexologists who used Kinsey's work as a media shibboleth to advance the cause of the new faith.

The authors do, however, overemphasize the more recent use of Kinsey's data in this way and the continuing impact of his "findings." As far as I know from my decades of contacts with social scientists, the great majority of them are aware that there is something "foul" about the Kinsey statistics. After all, as the authors show, there is a whole literature by social scientists about what is wrong with them. The important point is that, in spite of this knowledge, a great many sexologists and some other social "scientists" continue to refer to Kinsey as a kind of scientific totem.

Kinsey, Sex and Fraud shows that Kinsey and his colleagues went to great extremes in their pursuit of sexual factoids. As Paul Robinson and others have already shown, Kinsey redefined sex in a totally egalitarian manner, insisting that *only* sexual "outlets" matter. By this method of scientistic *ad hoc* assertion, one outlet of animalism is equal to Romeo's night of bliss with Juliet—one equals one, right? What could be more scientific? This "scientific" definition is the foundation of Kinsey's interview methods and statistics. Reisman and Eichel correctly note that "proof" by *ad hoc* assertion is very strange, but they proceed to overdo it by implying that Kinsey's strange idea of "sexual outlets" has greatly affected later studies and the development of sex education. It has not. I know of no one who now takes this idea seriously, and only we few with a historical interest in these curiosities even remember it.

Having begun with these scholarly warm-ups, the authors get to the heart of their work. Their "Dedication" anticipates the shocking charge of criminality: "To the several hundred children who suffered inhumanely in the illegal sex experiments that constitute the basis for a significant portion of Dr. Alfred Kinsey's book *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*." What the authors charge is that someone was reported by Kinsey *et alia* to have made systematic, timed, and logged sexual experiments on children down to the age of two months and to have proved in this way that even babies have orgasms.

I had no memory of Kinsey saying anything about child orgasm, nor did any of the several social scientists I asked about it. But Reisman and Eichel are right. Pages 175 to 182 of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, entitled "Pre-Adolescent Orgasm," presents detailed, numerical, tabular information about sex experiments performed by some unnamed "trained observers" on at least 317 boys aged from two months to fifteen years. Kinsey reported that these observations show that infants from five months on can have orgasms. Indeed, he solemnly reported that one infant sex athlete had 14 orgasms in 38 minutes, almost one every two minutes; and another sexual Olympian of four years had 26 orgasms in 24 hours.

Even after I checked to make sure Kinsey actually said those things, I had a suspicion the authors must have stretched a point by implying that Kinsey, his colleagues, or people trained by them (or someone) actually performed these sexual experiments. But a preliminary textual analysis leads me to conclude that they wrote in good faith. On page 181 Kinsey *et alia* note that T.V. Moore had observed in 1943 that he could find no single instance in which Freudians said they had directly observed infant sexual behavior of the sort they believed exists. Kinsey apparently saw this as a crucial question in the study of sexuality in general, so he set about getting such "records from trained observers." Kinsey says, "Complying with the scientifically fair demand for records from trained observers, and answering Moore's further demand that 'writers . . . test their theories . . . by empirical study and

LIBERAL ARTS

VIVE LA DIFFÉRENCE?

As Richard Rothschild reported in the *Chicago Tribune* last June 25, California psychiatrist Diane Mosbacher, daughter of Commerce Secretary Robert Mosbacher, has revealed she's a lesbian, saying, "It's important for gay people to have role models and for others to realize we are everywhere." She said of her father, "I love and respect him very much, but we're as different as a Republican and a lesbian activist could be."

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statistical procedures,' we have now reported observations on such specifically sexual activities as erection, pelvic thrusts, and the several other characteristics of true orgasm in a list of 317 pre-adolescent boys ranging between infants of five months and adolescence in age."

The crucial item here is the phrase "records from trained observers." The tabular records in this section look remarkably like other tables based on Kinsey's and his associates' own studies. Did they themselves make these sexual experiments? I doubt it very much, because in spite of what Kinsey says, I do not think children have orgasms at all and I am recalcitrant enough to find the idea of a four-year-old having 26 orgasms over 24 hours utterly bizarre. I also still believe, in spite of all of the above and more, that Kinsey was basically honest and that, had he made such direct observations of children, he would not have reported that they had orgasms.

My guess is that Kinsey or some co-worker(s) tried to turn some pederasts—perhaps from their prisoner or ex-con sample—into "trained observers" and that the pederasts either were delusionary enough to believe that their victims enjoyed their victimization (in the same way some rapists believe women enjoy being raped) or they were "putting on" the mad scientists. My hunch is that on this matter Kinsey was hoodwinked by someone in the same way he was taken in by a great many of his sex-talkers. He probably fell into the same trap that caught Margaret Mead in Samoa when she studied love under the palms among Samoan girls, and that journalists routinely step into when they ask politicians, "Do you believe your program will serve the public good?" In short, Kinsey was very gullible in all the ways you would expect an entomologist studying human sexuality to be.

More importantly, sexologists, social scientists, and the general public have been even more gullible in believing that "scientists" were presenting them with the truth about themselves. But this is not surprising. Gullibility is the external sign of the Great Myths of the age. The textbook writers who refer to the "great" work of Kinsey do not remember what bizarre things he actually said, nor do they care. They will likely not read this book, but will probably denounce it, the way anthropologists voted in a general meeting to condemn Derek Freeman's revelations in *Margaret Mead and Samoa* before they even saw the book.

I suggest that sexologists and the University of Indiana have a public responsibility to determine as clearly as possible at this late date what really *did* happen in this famous—or infamous—study. But I have a hunch that this will not be done.

Amore Mistico Palese

by Peter Russell

Everyone admires the beauty of the Stars.
When have the stars known Love as we know
Whose bodies to each other reveal
Bodies as radiant veiling inner worlds
Secretly manifest between the veils?

Children at school we were taught literal truths
We took for granted like the outer forms . . .

There comes a time though when the moon
Rises and the stars are dimmed
And hidden worlds light up in silver light . . .

The old world's nothing but smoky bonfires
And ugly shouts from end to end the earth.

When She reveals her golden breasts and drops
Silken and glistening her black mass
Of jet on the luminous bloom
Of waxen ivory shoulders,
In the thoughtful amazing shadow
Starlight and moonlight fade,
And brighter light from darkness that is golden
Issues precipitous in talking silences.

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The Christian Condition

by M. Christiane von Kuehnelt-Leddihn

"Faith is required of thee, and a sincere life, not loftiness of intellect, nor deepness in the Mysteries of God."

—Thomas à Kempis

Bernanos Vivant
by R.L. Bruckberger
Paris: Albin Michel

◆

This is, in fact, a book about two men, since, due to his strong personality and his close relationship to Georges Bernanos, the author plays an important part in it. "I wanted to draw only a summary portrait," he says, "but I know that even the most successful portrait reveals as much about the painter as it does about his subject. I do not deny the particularly subjective character of this book." Therefore, and because biographical data concerning Bernanos is scarce, both men need to be introduced briefly here.

Georges Bernanos was born in 1888 in Paris and died in 1948 in Neuilly. He was married and had six children; one of his sons fought with Franco in the Spanish Civil War, two with the Allies in World War II. Bernanos left France in 1938 for Morocco, then went to Brazil. He returned to France in 1946. The minor fortune he had made with his early novels was soon spent, but thanks to a devoted friend the family managed to live moderately well. However, the fact that he had been absent from France during the time of her worst humiliation and that he had not been active in the *Résistance* seems to have troubled him in later years, although he never said as much. He was very much a man of the Right, a monarchist who was sent to jail as a *camelot du roi*; but he rejected the "divine right of kings" which, he said, monarchs began to claim only in the 15th century. De Gaulle admired him and wanted him to serve as his minister of education.

R.L. Bruckberger is a Dominican monk, born in 1907 in Murat (Auvergne) of an Austrian father and a French mother. Severely wounded in 1940, he was made a chaplain for the *Résistance* in 1944, and for the Foreign Legion in the French Sahara from 1948-1950. From 1950 to 1958 he lived in the United States, "exiled" by his Order under governmental pressure for having revealed, in a book, the savage excesses of certain parts of the *Résistance*. While in America, he was a contributor to the *New York Times*, *Life*, and other publications. He wrote and published many books and essays, and directed and co-directed several plays and films. He, too, is a man of the Right; in his latest book, *Capitalisme? Mais c'est la vie!*, he describes the New Testament as a message of human inequality.

Anna Mycek-Wodecki

"I am writing this book," Bruckberger says, "to give evidence on the one who for me was master and friend, to say some of those things which a writer never writes, which he allows to slip obliquely into a conversation and which would be lost if an attentive ear did not catch them." One hopes that it will eventually be translated, but until it is, readers will have to make do with my translations of passages quoted here.

Bruckberger met Bernanos for the first time in 1937, but he had been deeply impressed by his writings since 1926, when at the age of 19 he read *Sous le soleil de Satan*, Bernanos' first book which was then just published. He felt that he had found "the man who would initiate him into the great things of the mind." Their friendship can be said to have begun then, and continued until Bernanos' death.

It irritated Bernanos to be called a "Catholic writer" or a "Catholic novelist" because he considered the term an amalgam of two, by nature different, elements. He felt himself first and foremost to be a Christian, a Catholic Christian, and only secondarily a writer. Though not much of a reader, he greatly admired Pascal, Dostoyevsky and, above all, Péguy. However, the only man who had a decisive influence on his reasoning and his spiritual style was a man who is today practically unknown, Edouard Drumont. Drumont's fierce anti-Semitism, particularly prominent in his *La France Juive*, caused all his books to be banned, although some of them contain a profound and accurate analysis of the deterioration of French society, the failure of the French ruling classes—the higher clergy, the administration, the political microcosm, the intellectuals—to maintain their responsibility to

M. Christiane von Kuehnelt-Leddihn writes from Austria.

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the cultural mission of France, a concept the meaning of which they no longer understood. (Considering Drumont's anti-Semitism of secondary importance, Bernanos planned a compendium of his writings to be assembled by Bruckberger and prefaced by himself. The manuscript still exists, but given the events of that time—the Munich Agreement had just been signed—Bruckberger foresaw the consequences of publication and the book was never printed.)

Drumont had been traumatized by what happened in Paris after the *Commune*, when fierce and bloody vengeance was taken; Bernanos suffered a similar traumatization when, early in the Spanish Civil War, he witnessed in Majorca the brutal treatment of not only Republican fighters but of civilians. In *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune* he wrote: "I have been taught to fear crime in the service of evil, but I have seen it in the service of the only order I both recognize and love." That Franco called his insurrection a "crusade" amounted for Bernanos to blasphemy. Back from Spain, he was bombarded with demands for his impressions, but as usual he took his time. In the solitude of his Toulon domicile, he wrote *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune*. Unlike Maritain and Mauriac who, Bruckberger says, were concerned only with the superficial appearance of the upheaval, Bernanos probed its depths. His support of the Republican side and his total condemnation of France's movement on the strength of what he had seen in Majorca, caused Simone Weil, an ardent socialist, to write him a long letter pointing out the horrors committed by the Republicans. But the trauma went too deep for the letter to make an impression.

From distant Brazil, Bernanos saw in the much-celebrated Munich Agreement the confirmation of his worst presentiments of the threat to France. The events of May and June 1940 proved him only too right. In his *Lettres aux Anglais* (Rio de Janeiro 1942, Paris 1946) he says, "I am fed up, dear Mr. Roosevelt, with hearing—even from M. Maritain—about democracies as opposed to dictatorships. Democracy constitutes no defense whatsoever against dictatorships. Every democracy can, from one moment to the next, undergo a dictatorial crisis, whatever its national character."

If the larger parts of Bernanos' writing are in their nature critical-polemical, a devastating judgment of what is commonly called realistic politics (*i.e.*, the cynical betrayal of a given word or the sacrifice of values to a nation's immediate needs), this is owing not so much to an inner revulsion as to "the indignation, the fury, the pity felt by an old salt at the presumptuous ineptitude of a youngster who proclaims his intention to sail around the world alone and begins his preparations by throwing his compass into the sea and breaking his rudder."

Between Bernanos and the modern world no compromise was possible. Ever since the completion of his first book, he had his position fixed, his territory staked, his limits drawn. The fate of France, so intricately connected with Christianity, never ceased to preoccupy him. He saw the beginning of all evil in the Renaissance, in the usurping of power by the evolving bourgeoisie; the break caused by the Renaissance he considered worse than the one produced later by the French Revolution. The Renaissance had sterilized and deprived of its very substance the greatest attempt to revitalize the spirit of the Gospels—the spiritual upheaval begun by St. Francis of Assisi. After the Poverello's death, "the gilded and purpled scum breathed a sigh of relief," and everything returned to normal.

In an interview given by Bernanos to *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* in 1926, he put his views in a nutshell. They were a profound shock to Bruckberger, since they contradicted everything the young monk had been taught. For Bernanos, Catholicism is not just a set of rules imposed from outside; it is the rule of life, it is life itself. A profound analysis of the human passions presupposes the concept of sin; without this, "moral man" remains a monster in the literary sense of the term, and a "decent man" is a well-functioning mechanism, a Cartesian animal. And this, undeniably, is what the Renaissance led to, by trying to make of the Devil a simple spectator who only intervenes either to applaud or to boo: the next step is his total elimination. But with the Devil removed, the moralist's power is short-lived, for he is soon replaced by the hygienist. No Devil, no moral, only hygiene.

Like Péguy, Bernanos was not afraid to speak of Christianity, of the crusade in its original meaning of pilgrimage. And for this, at least, the modern world makes long voyages by land or sea unnecessary: the *partes infidelium*, like the Kingdom of God, are within us, in our minds and in our hearts, and it is there that we must fight our battles, launch our crusades. Péguy's definition of what one might call "the Christian condition," as against Malraux' *condition humaine*, perfectly expresses Bernanos' own conviction: "Those safely assured of their daily bread, the beneficiaries of social security, the civil servants, the monks, they all cannot lead truly Christian lives. These can be led only by those whose daily bread is not assured, by gamblers, by adventurers, by the poor, the destitute, by industrialists and businessmen, by married men and fathers, those great adventurers of our modern world."

Having so far spoken mostly about Bernanos the polemicist and controversial critic, I turn now to his fictional work, created entirely between 1926 and 1937 with the exception of *Monsieur Ouine*, published in 1946. In the case of Bernanos it is difficult to draw a clear dividing line between the novelist and the theorist, between his fiction and the rest of his *oeuvre*, because both are concerned (one could almost say obsessively) with the two most significant components in their author's character, his devotion to his faith and his love for France.

As a young man, Bernanos had hesitated between three vocations: the priesthood, medicine, and law. Whether as priest, doctor, or lawyer, he knew that he would devote himself to others to the point of self-abnegation. Of the many great writers of his age, he is probably the only one, Bruckberger says, who lived up to his vocation totally and unequivocally. To Bernanos, it was evident that the vocation of a novelist is as exacting as that of a Trappist monk. Opening his schoolboy's copybook every morning and faced by its blank pages, he felt at a loss. Would he be able to probe deeply enough into his inner world to discover the persons waiting there to be brought to life? What were they going to do, what was going to happen to them? He looked

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and listened, trying not to intervene: "I try to think otherwise than I feel." But he loved all his characters, as God loves his creatures and permits them to act freely. Bruckberger gives neither a complete nor a chronological list of Bernanos' writings, from which he quotes more or less at random. An interested reader will find the translated works in any public library, and a young person might do well to begin the discovery of Bernanos through his fiction. Those who read French should, of course, try to get hold of the original texts.

Even more so than Dostoyevsky, Bernanos drives situations and characters to the extreme, anything less seeming hardly to interest him. In *Les Enfants humiliés*, a collection of essays, he says: "I have dreamed of saints and heroes, neglecting the intermediary forms of our species, and I have become aware that these forms hardly exist, that saints and heroes alone count. The intermediary forms are a gelatinous mass; if you take a handful at random you know the rest, and this jelly would not even deserve to be given a name if it were not for the saints and the heroes to whom they owe the right to be called human." Although Bernanos did not read much and knew hardly any authors of his or, for that matter, of any other time, he would have agreed with Anatole France, who said: "*Il n'y a de supportable que les choses extrêmes*"—"only extremes are bearable." In his fiction Bernanos reestablished, in its authentic dimension, the moral order of the universe threatened by the ever-accelerating disintegration of bourgeois society; the only order in which we can rediscover our consciences as well as the taste, the lust for life, for the effort and the risk proportionate to our dignity as human beings created in the image of God. In Bruckberger's estimation, neither Proust nor Céline, neither Stendahl nor Flaubert measures up to the temerity of this matador in the literary bullring. He had not many male friends because, says Bruckberger, "men are frivolous and not aware of the risks Bernanos undertook . . . not physically, but spiritually, knowing that one wrong word could have disastrous effects. Women are more sensitive, they have a feeling for the dangers underlying every venture in the course of its trite, day-to-day procedure."

Due to his (as usual) straitened circumstances, Bernanos published his second novel in two parts, *L'Imposture* and *La Joie*. But although these early works are among his best, the one that reveals most about this unique man is *La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette*, the last of his novels written before the nonfiction period. It was composed under the impact of horrors committed by Franco's supporters in Majorca, but coming from a professed Catholic Christian this story of apparently unredeemable despair is an enigma; not a word in the entire book is about either God, the Church, or religion. And yet it is not a glorification of suicide but, as Bernanos told Bruckberger, an attempt to save his faith and his sanity in the face of dreadful crimes committed in the name of what he valued and cherished above all else. One year earlier his *Journal d'un curé de campagne* was published and there, according to Bruckberger, we find in the main character a close resemblance to Bernanos. "It is the peculiarity of children, heroes, and saints not to be able to draw a clear line between what is possible and what is not. This applies to Bernanos the man and to the fascinating, exuberant, fraternal character of his work to which the only means of admission is a certain candidness, the candidness of Alice in Wonderland which allows her to see people as they are, no matter how surprising this may be."

The unusual testimony to a great man and a great friendship introduces the reader to the many-splendored work of Bernanos, to his spirituality and his realism, to his love of God and His world. In the second volume of his published letters, one finds the following words: "When I am dead, tell the sweet kingdom of this earth that I loved it more than I ever dared to say."

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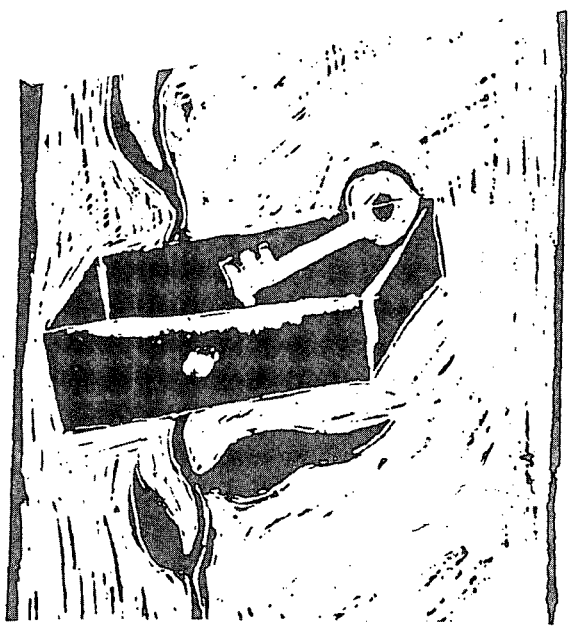
Inventory

by Tom Disch

Crammed ever tighter, stacked ever higher,
all jammed together, the artifacts
Of fifty years agglomerate in cupboards,
closets, cartons, drawers and shelves
Until one final fatal freebie triggers
the avalanche and the levee fails,
The seeds split their pods, the spores
disperse to mushroom everywhere:
Heaps of cast-off clothing climb the backs
of chairs, then shoot out threads
That cling to moldings and lamp poles
which soon are festooned with webs
Of underwear and overalls; stacks of paperbacks
ascend on both sides of the toasters
And form a bridge to the ziggurat of stereo
components where a horde of extras—
White elephants, senile Walkmen, silly
69¢ tshotchkes, unsprung windups—
Re-enact Griffith's *Intolerance*; the magazines
become a liquid mass that breaks
Against the pilings of the coffee table; the air
rustles with bills paid to vanished
Department stores, still shimmering like willow
leaves, still insistent as tombstones
On the facts they commemorate, purchases
and purposes else lost to history;
Dishes spill from their secret places, flotsam
on the tide of periodicals, awash
In the wrack of a lifetime's robinsonade:
cans of dry putty, coils
Of clothesline, nests of flowerpots, plastic
jack-o'-lanterns and Easter baskets,
And the gleanings of a dozen shingled beaches—



things of beauty, toys forever,
To release one's grip on any of which
would be to accede to Heraclitus
That nature's a promiscuous flame, one wick
the same to it as another,
No single seashell lovelier than the rest,
all estimations of worth
As arbitrary as the prices Van Gogh got
in his lifetime or gets now in Japan;
Now's the time to call the Savanarola
Extermination Service, but no, too late,
Already that memo is a fossil in the rich
deposits of the desk, lost among pencils
And lapsed warranties; already the third telephone,
ringing with terror, has crawled beneath
The bed to enlist in its limbo of dustballs
and old shoes, some scarcely worn,
While within the tiered suitcases atop the closet
rumors of annihilation spread:
Trousers that have waited years for waists
to match their waistlines, T-shirts
That have told the same joke too many times,
bold prints that want their former
Confidence—all foresee the bonfires
of their vanity; so must a fetus
Feel at the first whisper of the word Abort
or dinosaurs as the comet appears
Announcing their extinction, inexorable
and all unmerited;—or as the texts
That Heraclitus in his heyday wrote
and thought immortal, which were
Preserved in Alexandria's great library
a little while and then incinerated.

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Beyond Hubris

by Juliana Geran Pilon

Modernity on Endless Trial
by Leszek Kolakowski
Chicago and London:
The University of Chicago Press;
304 pp., $24.95

◆

With disarming and hardly disingenuous modesty, Polish humanist Leszek Kolakowski describes his new anthology, *Modernity on Endless Trial*, as a loose collection of "semi-philosophical sermons" written over the course of a decade or so, purporting to offer no original philosophy. He adds, as an apparent afterthought, that he views them as conscious, deliberate appeals for "moderation in consistency"—an idea for which he, a very much *former* Marxist, confesses a long-standing fascination. In fact, these intellectual cameos are sophisticated attempts to struggle with some of the most difficult and interesting challenges to our culture; their style is so elegant and refreshingly clear as to delight even the reader who on occasion may take exception to some of the author's conclusions.

The book is divided into four parts: modernity, barbarity, and intellectuals; the dilemmas of the Christian legacy; liberals, revolutionaries, and utopians; and scientific theories. In more or less logical order, these categories embrace the question of what modernity is (or is not), together with two related epistemological-sociological questions: should modernity be placed in the dock at all, and if so, who is qualified to judge it? (Certainly not the self-righteous but usually deeply flawed intellectuals, whom the equally contemptuous Solzhenitsyn has called "the smatterers.") Kolakowski further explores the contribution of religion and the role of faith; the shortcomings of utopias, revolutions, and politics generally; and finally he offers a transcendental—and quixotic—critique of all ideology, including the self-righteously "scientific" kind.

To begin with, he lays to rest the idea that "modernity" is something to be for or against insofar as the development of technology and economic rationality are concerned. Kolakowski's chief fear is that, in the name of modernity and a mystical sense of "progress," we shall witness the disappearance of what he calls "taboos," defined by him as "barriers erected by instinct and not by conscious planning," whose function is nothing less than the preservation of social life. "Various traditional human bonds which make communal life possible, and without which our existence would be regulated only by greed and fear, are not likely to survive without a taboo system," Kolakowski argues; on this pragmatic ground, he is prepared to defend them.

On the one hand, Kolakowski unequivocally attacks reason as a moral guide, since what he takes to be "the normal sense of 'rationality'" allows for—indeed invites—nominalist relativism. Thus he bluntly and clearly asserts that "there are no more rational grounds for respecting human life and human personal rights than there are, say, for forbidding the consumption of shrimp among Jews." Yet this proposition flies blatantly in the face of the natural rights theory of Immanuel Kant, whom Kolakowski in another essay correctly and emphatically praises.

The essay "Why Do We Need Kant?" is in fact a particularly astute rendering of the German philosopher's rather complex rationalist ethics. Kolakowski appreciates that the classical doctrine of natural rights asserts that each human being is by his nature unequivocally entitled to fundamental rights and that people are ends in themselves—ideas that, contrary to other, less sophisticated naturalist theories, emphatically do not belong to an empirical concept. Kolakowski regards as essential the appreciation that the ethical understanding of humanity derives legitimately from neither anthropological nor historical research, but is rather substantiated morally. And Kant, of course, derived that moral ground from practical reason.

On this issue, Kolakowski is tentative. While noting that moral substantiation *can* be obtained through postulating absolutely autonomous principles of practical reason, and hence might not have to rely on religious tradition, he avoids taking a stand on the matter by noting simply that its resolution is "another question." One senses that Kolakowski has great sympathy with Kant's rational moral justification on a purely intellectual—which is to say, rational—level. Yet Kolakowski seems to lean away from it in the end, for the Dostoyevskian reason that human beings are not equal to this kind of rationality, and that without God, to echo the great novelist, "anything is possible."

Kolakowski fears the human penchant for invoking "rationality" to dismiss age-old traditions—a tendency to which intellectuals especially are prone—and invoke certainty and ideology in the service of grand illusions whose result is terror and destruction. Having witnessed the tragedy of his own country, the monstrosity of Nazism followed by the horrors of communism, Kolakowski will forever appreciate the danger of inhumanity in the name of deceptively lofty but in fact barbarous principles. The result, in his case, is a skepticism that has turned dogmatism into its opposite: an apology for balance, for tradition, for pluralism at all costs—even at the cost of abjuring philosophy. Kolakowski appears to have been stunned into forgiveness and tolerance.

Sympathetic to the forces of novelty and, for lack of a better term, "modernity," Kolakowski deplores the "spirit of technology" and believes that Christianity alone has the power to shield man from the evils of despair on the one hand and *hubris* on the other.

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"The choice between total perfection and total self-destruction is not ours; cares without end, incompleteness without end, these are our lot."

Far from deploring his destiny away from his native Poland (having been exiled in 1968, he divides his teaching career between Oxford and the University of Chicago), Kolakowski values exile as an existential manner of being. In fact, he considers it to be the defining predicament of our time, which he views as "the age of refugees, of migrants, vagrants, nomads, roaming about the continents and warming their souls with the memory of their—spiritual or ethnic, divine or geographical, real or imaginary—homes." He knows that absolute homelessness is impossible. And yet there are entire peoples who—while remaining in their ancestral homes—have been exiled within, estranged from their own cultures, histories, and personal realities. In 1985, Kolakowski could still ask whether the entire world might be driven into internal half-exile. He finds the root of that condition in "the split between the State, which people feel is not theirs, though it claims to be their owner, and the motherland of which they are guardians." Today, there is hope for recently liberated Eastern and Central Europe. And yet the destruction of the nearly five decades that preceded liberation has left an indelible scar. Kolakowski asks: "Does God try to remind us, somewhat brutally, that exile is the permanent human condition? A ruthless reminder, indeed, even if deserved."

Kolakowski ultimately reveals himself to be romantic, one who dares to question God's motives, who even suspects them of "brutality." Yet he believes man needs to remember that his earthly existence is temporary and that he has been placed here for reasons he is not meant to understand. What makes these essays worth reading is a sense they create of their author's genuine love for mankind, with all its terrible foibles and its desire to emulate its Creator. Kolakowski reminds us of our limitations. Which is, of course, a well-deserved reminder.

Juliana Geran Pilon is vice president of the National Forum Foundation in Washington.

Sanity Begins at Home

by John C. Chalberg

Gentleman Rebel
by H. Stuart Hughes
New York:
Ticknor and Fields;
362 pp., $24.95

◆

To begin on a positive note: anyone who shuddered at the prospect of a barely thirty-something Edward Kennedy in the U.S. Senate cannot be wholly without redeeming social value. The year was 1962, and H. Stuart Hughes, grandson of the 1916 Republican presidential nominee of the same surname and devotee of a SANE foreign policy, offered himself to the voters of Massachusetts as an alternative to an additional dose of Kennedy liberalism. Hughes, of course, lost by an embarrassingly wide margin. All of this and more is chronicled in a memoir that contains embarrassments apolitical.

Henry Adams this author is not. Unlike Adams', Hughes' grandfather lost his bid for the presidency. Unlike Adams, Hughes did dirty his hands by seeking elective office on his own. And unlike Adams, Hughes has written a memoir that tells us more than we need to know about the prolonged (and repressed) sexual adolescence of his "unspent" youth. Parental "scruples" regarding sexual matters have apparently "haunted" not only his childhood, but his adulthood as well. From his mother Hughes learned two lessons: avoid playing with one's "precious organs" and the "wicked prosper, so why try." A convert to atheism and socialism at the hardly spent age of 16, Hughes at least had the good sense not to try overly hard to make the world over into his unrepressed adolescent vision of the good society.

Spurning family traditions of politics and the law, the youthful Hughes preferred to remain within the cloister of academe. Then came World War II. At Amherst, Hughes had taken the Oxford Pledge. But the fall of France prompted him to vote for Wendell Wilkie and intervention in 1940. Then came the draft. Terrified at the prospect, Hughes soon discovered army life to be surprisingly tolerable.

Actually, Hughes' wartime experiences make for interesting reading—probably they constituted the high point of his life, though he would no doubt be loathe to admit as much. In fact, this memoir could be advanced as Exhibit A by advocates of compulsory national service. A secret admirer of an "ordered existence," Hughes "easily adapted" to military service. A "marginal member" of the upper class, he learned what it was like to be a "second class citizen." Nonetheless, within the military bullying was nonexistent, and one H. Stuart Hughes became "less a prig."

Impatient to become an officer, Hughes signed on with the OSS. Admiration for the Red Army was immediate and unrestrained, but Hughes insists that he was never "blindly pro-Soviet." Still, his self-defined wartime mission was to encourage the democratic left and reinvigorate the Popular Front. Nearly a half century after World War II and better than a year after the end of the Cold War, H. Stuart Hughes is still looking to revive the Popular Front.

Fancying himself to be the "only real American social democrat," Hughes set out to establish himself as a young Henry Adams in early Cold War Washington. Between visits with his aging grandfather (who at 85 ate *his* hated broccoli, because it had never occurred to him that it was within his power to ban the "offending vegetable" from his plate), Hughes read and reread *The Education of Henry Adams*, fretted over the decline of the once "sensual city," and objected to the Cold War policies of an "inadequate" Harry Truman. But the real enemy was less Truman than the "national interest." Disdainful of this "meaningless" concept, Hughes grew increasingly agitated at the developing prominence within Washington of George F. Kennan, who provided the intellectual undergirding for the Truman-inspired Cold War, and whose 1946 "Long Telegram" was little more than an "intemperate . . . outburst of frustration."

The same could be said of the second half of this memoir. Though Hughes claims to have discovered happiness in a southern California-based second marriage, he remains an unreconstructed anti-Cold Warrior. In 1991 he thinks what he thought in 1946, specifically that the Cold War

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was not inevitable and that the United States bears the majority of the blame for its occurrence.

Hughes at least has been consistent. He objected to all of the Truman Cold War initiatives, the Marshall Plan included. In 1948 he did join the Wallace campaign, only to jump ship when the captain refused to jettison his communist support. Nonetheless, Hughes still insists that Wallace was correct to hold out for a "sphere of influence" approach to Soviet-American differences. Had each power only stayed out of the other's backyard, then each power would have been able to tolerate "substantial dissent" within its own sphere. (Guess which power Hughes accuses of violating his guidelines.) But in effect the United States did concede Central and Eastern Europe to the Soviets, without a noticeable rise in the level of tolerable dissent.

In the world according to H. Stuart Hughes, all of Europe could have been liberated in 1946. That it was not, was primarily the fault of the United States. And when liberation finally did arrive in 1989, Washington, happily, "played no role." The long sustained American decision to help preserve freedom in Western Europe apparently had nothing to do with the ultimate Revolution of 1989. No doubt the whole of the Cold War was an insanity to one so SANE. As of the publication of this memoir, the world still awaits the liberation of H. Stuart Hughes from shibboleths outworn at the birth of the Cold War in the late 1940's and believable only to the likes of Hughes himself—including the now senior senator from Massachusetts whom he so ineffectually challenged nearly thirty years ago.

John C. Chalberg teaches American history at Normandale Community College in Bloomington, Minnesota.

Feminist Fatale

by J.O. Tate

Good Boys and Dead Girls: And Other Essays
by Mary Gordon
New York: Viking; 253 pp., $19.95

◆

Because I well remember reading some of the pieces Mary Gordon has assembled here, I had no reason to wish to reread them and no cause to want to read the ones I'd been lucky to miss the first time around. What I think about Mary Gordon's writing reminds me of a favorite malapropism: "Do I have to spell it out for you in four-letter words?"

The first thing that disgusts me about Mary Gordon's literary screeds is their phony tone. Her "voice"—because she hasn't really got one—is a chalk-squeak of false notes. She sounds like a feminist drug addict who overdosed on Virginia Woolf, with the result that everything annoying in the arch breathlessness of Bloomsburian preciosity is magnified. Reading Mary Gordon is exhausting, because of all the cringes she provokes. The repeated use of "one," to cite an example—the third person substituting for the first and second—isn't American usage, but the artsy-craftsy hoity-toitiness makes for a "literary" air, does it not? "If only one had the Ford of *A Man Could Stand Up* at one's side to tell one, in the most beautiful sentences imaginable, why men need women and women need men!" Oh yeah? If only one had the Benny Hill of the syndicated TV show to demonstrate to one, in the rudest way conceivable, why one doesn't need Mary Gordon for anything, then one's feelings (those little dears) would be ever so gratified! And perhaps then one would not so often feel, as, reading these pages, one often does, that one was watching a Girl Scout try to walk in her first pair of high heels.

The load of tea-and-crumpets-with-Virginia-Woolf codswallop takes many forms, but I think is only a symptom of a more fundamental imposture. She is always carrying on about being an "artist," a "writer," a "writer-artist," and a "novelist." When one considers her latest novel, *The Other Side*, such hauteur seems preposterous. Trying to sound like Henry James writing his prefaces is, after all, not recommended to anyone who is not Henry James. *Quod licet Jovi, non licet bovi.*

Mary Gordon's vindictive, even nasty essay, "'I Can't Stand Your Books': A Writer Goes Home," is a highly revealing and instructive document. She has insisted here on an attempt to embarrass various relatives for having, at a family funeral, intimated to her their dislike of her writing. Even the deceased, her uncle—a supporter of the ERA!—had not approved of her work. But there is noble Mary—"I held my baby son in my arms and wept . . . I walked with my infant son . . ."—who survives this episode to publish her contempt for her family, and to reveal what has long been obvious: she despises the Irish-American Catholics whom she affects to write about. She doesn't understand

LIBERAL ARTS

ABORTION AS LEGALIZED EXECUTION

A Morristown, New Jersey, municipal judge ruled last June that a Queens man interfered in a "legal execution" when he stormed a doctor's office last year to prevent his former fiancée from having an abortion. In a highly unusual ruling, Judge Michael Noonan upheld 27-year-old Alex Loce's claim that the fetus the woman was carrying was a human being.

Loce was found guilty of trespassing when he and 14 others stormed the clinic in September 1990 in an unsuccessful attempt to prevent the abortion. As Judge Noonan told a packed courtroom, "I find that the 8-week-old fetus in this case was a living human being that was legally executed pursuant to the U.S. Supreme Court." Therefore, "there was no justifiable excuse to trespass and attempt to prevent a legal act of abortion."

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them or sympathize with them; I don't believe she even knows them. Mary Gordon is brazen in announcing her superiority to the community of which she is the self-appointed spokesperson.

> To think of oneself as a writer of literature rather than a journalist or a popular writer, one must think of oneself as a citizen of a larger world. By this I do not mean that one necessarily defines oneself as outside the community—my own prejudice is that to lose the identification with the small community is to lose irreplaceable riches. But if one is going to think of oneself as a writer-artist, one must think of oneself as in the company of other great artists. Artists who will not come from one's own community, who have lived in different ages, spoken different languages, written about people who exist only because these writers have preserved their lives. And if one is a writer whose early years were formed in a small, closed community, one must have the courage to understand that it is outside the community that one may very likely find the people who will be the audience for one's work.

Mary Gordon's audience is outside the community that she rejected, but that mustn't dare to reject her. She is one with Dante and Michelangelo, a legend in her own mind. Meanwhile, a fine writer such as Maureen Howard—who covers most of Gordon's fictional territory—is neglected, I daresay because she is not politically correct.

Even by Gordon's standards, her "Parts of a Journal" seem moronic, if not a parody by Woody Allen; her "Some Things I Saw" a mistake; and her "The Gospel According to Saint Mark" a presumptuous fiasco. But since qualitative distinctions are finally inappropriate in this vicinity, I want to conclude with some citations of fact. Mary Gordon to the contrary, Flannery O'Connor did *not* "contract" her fatal disease. She was *not* born in Milledgeville, Georgia. She did *not* discover that she was sick, as Gordon implies, and then return to Georgia, but rather discovered it visiting there and was unable to leave. O'Connor's reputation does *not* largely rest on her posthumous collection of short stories; Cecil Dawkins's first name is *not* Cecile. Get the picture?

In sum, *Good Boys and Dead Girls* is the expression of the kind of mind that would declare, "O'Connor's face was a peculiar one for a writer. . . . [I]t is a face from the provinces. . . . It is a face untouched by sexual experience or curiosity, which is why, perhaps, it seems not one of our own." The snooty coarseness of Mary Gordon prompts me finally to observe that her photo on the dust jacket shows a face that, as H.L. Mencken said, makes you want to burn every bed in America. It is a face unshaded by sense or scruple, one that in former and better times might have caused its possessor to be left out on a cold mountainside to be devoured by wolves. Today, though, the most one can hope for would be the unlikely event of an uncomplimentary review; but, as Fats Waller used to say, "One never knows—do one?"

J.O. Tate is a professor of English at Dowling College on Long Island.

A Song in My Heart, A Hole in My Head

by Florence King

Eleanor Roosevelt's "My Day," Volume III: First Lady of the World, 1953-1962
Edited by David Emblidge
Introduction by Frank Freidel
New York: Pharos Books;
361 pp., $19.95

◆

Eleanor Roosevelt and I go way back. My father taught me to read from a stack of her "My Day" columns in 1940. We happened to have a plentiful supply of "My Day" in the house because the doctor had refused to be responsible for my reactionary grandmother's blood pressure unless she stopped reading it. I was at the stage when children discover the scissors and enjoy cutting things out of newspapers, so they named me official censor. Far from raising the blood pressure as her early columns so often did, the samples in this third volume, written between the triumph of Eisenhower Republicanism and her death in 1962, more often than not raise the gorge. There is enough banality here to choke John Chancellor himself.

Lauding the pacifistic outlook of the "Interdependence Council," one of those starry-eyed fringe groups she could never resist, she wrote in 1956: "This organization may be only a candle lighted in a world which at present seems very dark to those who would like to see peace and goodwill established. But even a candle is better than no light at all, as many of us have discovered who live in areas where occasionally electric light is cut off for a time."

On how to be rich without money: "One of the real gifts that brings you riches, I think, is the power of appreciation. If you can enjoy the blue sky, the beauty of the fresh snow, or the first green of spring, if you can hear music and have it leave a song in your heart, if you can see a picture and take away something that is real and vital to dream about for days, then you have the ability to get joy out of your surroundings. That kind of appreciation is perhaps more valuable than some more tangible kinds of riches."

As ever, she is powerfully troubled by the tensions of our great cultural diversity that she did so much to bring about, but offers as solutions the platitudes of a chirpy headmistress settling a squabble over roommate assignments: "Whether the apartment next to you is occupied by a Greek or an Indian or a Negro or a Jew should make very little difference to you. My experience is that in New York City one sees very little of his nextdoor neighbor, and unless you want to know him, you certainly are not obligated to make friends. But you are obligated to be courteous and to willingly share the facilities which have to be used in common," she wrote in 1957. Two years later, the difficulties encountered by Harry Belafonte when he tried to rent an apartment in a white-only Manhattan building led her into one of those self-consciously noble and unconsciously funny Pollyannaisms that made millions of anti-New Dealers apoplectic: "I can think of nothing I would enjoy more than having Mr. and Mrs. Belafonte as my neighbors. I hope they

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will find a home shortly where they and their enchanting little boy can grow up without feeling the evils of the segregation pattern."

Anticipating Martin Sheen and Robert Redford, her favorite entry in the 1958 World Day of Prayer was the invocation of Chief Yellow Lark beginning "O, Great Spirit." In a 1955 column she beats the drums for the Thai "wai" form of greeting (palms pressed together in front of the body) over the Western customs involving physical contact: "I am not sure that they are not far better than our habit of shaking hands or the European habit of a gentleman kissing a lady's hand. The latter may be a charming and pleasing custom to the ladies but may not be so sanitary."

Mrs. Roosevelt wrote about whatever popped into her head, and there was very little that did not pop. Wisely, her editor has not even tried to arrange the columns in anything but chronological order, that being the only order they ever had. From Israeli *kabbutzim* to *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof* to "gerontomatriarchy" (her word for the control of American wealth by aging women) to lunch with Tito is par for the course. There are also pit stops at self-destructive romanticism, as when she plugs no-strings-attached foreign aid — "I feel somehow that agricultural surpluses are gifts from the Lord and it is not up to us to decide what shall be the political ideology of hungry people" — as well as an abundance of sheer drivel: "I do not know that Gandhi's plans for living could be applied to modern life, but there is no doubt in my mind that the more we simplify our material needs the more we are free to think of other things. Perhaps what we all need to do is to sit down and think through how this could be accomplished without the loss of gracious living." One Worldism meets the Junior League.

Although she was a member of the American aristocracy, she shrank from the aristocratic birthright of plain speech. The tone of her writing pulses with a cloying genteelness that makes her sound more like a socially insecure parvenu guided by the middle-class dictum, "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all." Attending a performance of *John Brown's Body* starring Raymond Massey and Tyrone Power, she explains laboriously: "I am frank to confess that I had not expected Mr. Power to give a performance which would satisfy me as this did." Having said, in effect, that she considered Tyrone Power a mere movie star, she reverts to sweet nothingness: "I saw many of my friends, so that it was a pleasant social evening as well as one of great artistic satisfaction."

The columns are full of these empty-calorie niceties, a few of which are unintentionally funny, such as: "I began to worry about getting to Pasadena in time for dinner and the evening meeting, remembering that the freeway between Los Angeles and Pasadena between five and six o'clock can be very crowded and very slow." That was the night she met Sophie Tucker, who dropped what may or may not have been a bombshell into ER's lap. We can't tell, because ER either chose to ignore it or else she did not realize the significance of what Tucker said: "She came to meet me at the end of her performance, saying it was high time we should meet since she had known my boys for a very long time. She is full of life, and I could not help thinking what an extraordinarily vivid personality she has." Very nice, but when somebody nicknamed the Red-Hot Mama says she knows all four of your sons, it is time to sit up and take notice.

Sometimes she knows perfectly well what she is saying, as when she adopts a mother's hurt feelings to inculcate guilt in her son James when his 1959 book, *Affectionately, F.D.R.*, showed her up as a bad nurturer. In his book James criticizes White House housekeeper Mrs. Nesbitt, "and in doing so, of course, in an indirect manner he criticizes me," ER wrote tremulously, "for he does not seem to realize that whatever Mrs. Nesbitt did she did under my direction." Such as using FDR and her sons as guinea pigs for Department of Agriculture menus devised for the poor. It was at one of these Lucullan feasts that James asked her if he paid an extra nickel, could he have a glass of milk? His book, ER concluded nobly, expressed "the feelings of a very young man, perhaps at the time not quite capable of understanding certain things and who, therefore, was impatient." James was 51 at the writing.

Her mask drops only once, revealing so thoroughly what she wishes to deny that one is almost embarrassed for her. The play *Advise and Consent*, based on Allen Drury's novel, filled her with "complete depression and disgust." It depicted "all the worst things that can be found in political situations that are brought about by the weakness of human nature." She was especially upset by the portrait of "the man who is willing to lie because he thinks the ultimate good will be a justification. . . . It was a shock to see the office of the President included in the general downgrading of human beings who go into politics with legitimate ambitions but who are still weak, small, vindictive, determined to gain their own ends whether good or bad, and ruthless where anyone except themselves is concerned."

She comes close to advocating censorship: "If this were wartime I think one would cry treason at this play." After voicing conventional fears about what the play will do to "young people," she calls for a positive, upbeat story about American politics to counteract the harm Drury's will cause, and concludes, "I think perhaps the fact that the play is so well done is something to be deplored."

The volume is not helped by editor Emblidge's lavish adoration of Eleanor Roosevelt, which makes many of his introductions to the columns almost as cloying as the columns themselves. He is right, however, in his belief that there has never been a woman quite like her. She has many clones in the feminist movements past and present, but in the history of wives of heads of state, she can be compared to only two.

In her officious energy she recalls Philippa of Hainault, who took advantage of her position as consort of Edward III to become a career woman, importing her native Flemish weavers and starting England's woolen industry between countless good deeds. And in her puritanical self-righteousness she recalls Mme. de Maintenon, morganatic wife of Louis XIV, who punished her pleasure-loving husband with her bans on overeating and sex.

Florence King's eighth book, With Charity Toward None: A Fond Look at Misanthropy, *will be published by St. Martin's Press in January.*

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Yellow Peril (Part II)

by William R. Hawkins

The Coming War with Japan
by George Friedman and Meredith Lebard
New York: St. Martin's Press; 429 pp., $24.95

◆

Do not be put off by the sensationalist title. This is a solid geopolitical and economic study of power in the Pacific during the 20th century. Basing their prophesy on the record, George Friedman and Meredith Lebard conclude that a second U.S.-Japanese war is highly probable in the early 21st century. The authors do not attempt to predict the details of such a war. Instead, they concentrate on the permanent factors that have put Washington and Tokyo on a collision course and write from the clear, cool perspective of *realpolitik*. Their book is divided into three parts of equal length: a history of U.S.-Japanese relations, a survey of the current situation, and a discussion of various alternative futures.

To many observers, the Japanese seem to be unstoppable. However, Friedman and Lebard argue that the threat of war comes not from Japan's apparent strength but from its fundamental weakness. Japan may have the world's second largest economy, but

> that economy is located on a series of islands too small to sustain it. If the Japanese economy is to compete with vast entities such as the United States and Europe, it must secure markets and resources that are readily at hand as have the other two. Japan has to go quite a distance before it can secure either markets or resources, and it must do so through waters controlled by the world's greatest economic power, Japan's old and dangerous nemesis, the United States.

This is the geostrategic problem that has always faced Japan, which must either create an empire or remain a vassal of the United States, subject to increasing economic pressure. Though its first bid for empire ended in 1945, Japan was resurrected from that defeat by a new war — the Cold War — during which the United States needed Japan as an ally against the Soviet Union. The United States paid a high price for this alliance, granting Japan an access to its markets that ruined a number of American companies and undermined the nation's industrial base. Now that the Cold War is over, there is no reason for America to continue to pay this price.

Friedman and Lebard repeatedly make the point that the appeal of free trade is gone:

> The end of the Cold War may well signal the end of the free-trade era and a cyclical return to segmented markets. In such a segmented and regionalized world, economic well-being will rest with those who hold political and military power. . . . The ability to close off one's markets to competitors might well bring great economic benefit, or at least social peace.

Since the United States is the only true superpower in the wake of economic collapse and ethnic strife in the Soviet Union, it is in a position to benefit from the return of "normal" power politics and mercantilism:

> The power of the U.S. to impose tolls on trade and punish traders that cut into U.S. markets is a starkly real power. . . . It is utterly inconceivable that the United States will not use its vast naval power to try to gain economic advantage.

Tokyo must look to the future with trepidation. Japan imports 99 percent of its oil, and in 1988 imported 93 percent of all the nickel, 57 percent of all the copper, and 30 percent of all the coal and iron available on the world market. Exports account for 15 percent of Japan's GNP and half its annual economic growth. On average, every merchant ship in the world must visit Japan 1.3 times a year to carry its trade. And the situation will only get worse.

The United States has demanded that Japan shift from exports to domestic development, but Friedman and Lebard argue that this will not work. Increasing domestic demand will not lessen the need for raw material imports, thus making exports necessary to cover the cost. Japan also has a severe labor shortage that requires the use of foreign workers. And as an economically mature nation, Japan is finding that its large capital surplus is attracted to foreign investments. While this money is going mainly to buy real estate, securities, and banks in America and Europe, it is also being used to develop mines, oil fields, farmland, and basic industry in Asia and Latin America.

One-third of Japan's exports go to the United States. As the creator of the world's most open market, Japanese business has been quick to exploit this golden opportunity. But Tokyo knows that these days are numbered as political resentment grows. With Europe moving towards economic union in 1992 and the United States negotiating a North American trading zone, Japan is seeking its own economic preserve, a new version of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, only its horizons will extend farther this time.

Three countries loom large in this plan: Indonesia, which offers Japan labor, raw materials (including oil), and a key to the Malacca Strait; India, which has a large potential market and is already a major source of raw materials; and the Philippines, the cornerstone of America's military establishment in Asia. New Delhi wants to control the Indian Ocean, and Japanese technology could help India build a navy and air force to do it. An Indian fleet might be a better safeguard for Japanese oil shipments from the Persian Gulf than the U.S. Navy, if the trade war heats up. And if the United States were forced out of its bases in the Philippines, it would be very difficult for Washington to project its power into the western Pacific in the face of Japanese hostility. It can be expected that increasingly Japanese influence in the Philippines will be used to support those who favor such an American expulsion.

To protect this maritime empire, Japan will have to seek naval supremacy in the Pacific. Tokyo could not depend on economic influence alone to control such a large, varied, and unstable area; as the authors note, "being rich and quite weak is normally an invitation for catastrophe." Japan has the industrial and technological means to pursue such a plan of supremacy.

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The United States has taken out the wrong parts of the Cold War apparatus. Washington has been cutting back elements of its own strength, rather than of the strength of others. Nothing could be more dangerous than continued American pressure on Japan to increase its navy, and to play a larger role in world affairs. With the waning of the Soviet threat, the United States no longer has an interest in a stronger and more active Japan.

The way for a country to deter war is to become so strong that no one dares to challenge it. For a powerful America to regain economic preeminence, it may be necessary to continue to make Japan pay tribute to Washington by supporting policies that are not in Tokyo's interests, as in the case of the Gulf War. The most important thing is to keep the balance of power tilted towards America.

Japan has always wanted to dominate the Pacific and thus to control its own destiny, but it discovered in 1945 that the price for such ambition could be prohibitive. Japan underestimated American resolve in 1941. Washington should never again allow Tokyo to believe it can successfully move against American interests.

William R. Hawkins writes from Knoxville, Tennessee.

Trending West

by Gregory McNamee

Prose & Poetry of the American West
Edited by James C. Work
Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; 733 pp., $25.00

"Of making many books there is no end," Ecclesiastes has it. Like the endless streams of cat-cartoon and celebrity workout books, the flow of books factual or fictional about the American West seems not only interminable but ever-increasing. The region has long been a popular setting for a great mass of pulp fiction, to which hundreds of new titles are added yearly. As writers of higher seriousness abandon the artificial canyons of New York for such sundry locales as southern Arizona and western Montana, not to mention Hollywood and even Texas, a host of books with promise to endure has been joined to what was as recently as two decades ago a very small body of worthwhile writing indeed.

Where there is a literature there is an anthologist, and with the increase of writing from the American West there has been an increase in collections purporting to represent it. In the last few years there have been serviceable gatherings like Russell Martin and Marc Barasch's *Writers of the Purple Sage* (Penguin Books), a few dogs like Alex Blackburn's *The Interior Country* (Swallow Press), and a slew of in-betweens. James C. Work's sensibly named *Prose & Poetry of the American West* makes all but Russell and Barasch's collection redundant, and is one of the better-conceived anthologies of American writing of any kind.

Given an abundance of high-quality material—and in this instance there is no shortage of good writing on the American West, buried though it may be under a mudslide of dimestore novels—the anthologist's chief problem is organization. Mr. Work undoubtedly considered many schemes before arriving at the frame of his book, an arguable chronological division of the literature into four major eras.

The editor places the first, "The Emergence Period," in the years 1540-1832, and he chooses as his exemplars, among other items, a sequence of Native American emergence myths, an account by the conquistador Pedro de Castañeda (a less gifted chronicler than his later compatriots Escalante and Garcés), and passages from the always stirring journals of Lewis and Clark. The section closes with Walt Whitman's lovely ode "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" Here Mr. Work's division breaks down, for by his own logic Whitman's well-known poem belongs somewhere near the middle of his next section, "The Mythopoeic Period (1833-89)," which showcases selections from Whitman's contemporaries Mark Twain, Bret Harte, and John Wesley Powell.

That section also introduces the work of early women writers like the quirky, often brilliant Mary Austin, whose *Land of Little Rain* and *The Land of Journeys' Ending* remain benchmarks of Southwestern writing; Helen Hunt Jackson, whose romantic novel *Ramona* (1884) introduced New England literary sensibilities to southern California; and Willa Cather, who ranks among the greatest Western writers, period. It is regrettable that Mr. Work could not have found room in his already overstuffed collection for something by Martha Summerhayes, a fine memoirist, but at least he had the foresight to omit an appearance by Mabel Dodge Luhan, who cultivated

LIBERAL ARTS

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AT THE IVY LEAGUE

Two Ethiopian women who came to America to study physics at Dartmouth College were killed last June by a fellow Ethiopian who struck them repeatedly with an ax. Haileselassie Girmay, a 32-year-old friend of the victims and an Ethiopian-born geology teacher at a Swedish university, was arrested at the apartment where the bodies were found. He was reportedly staying with the women while he visited. These are the first murders in the Ivy League college community in more than fifty years.

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the arts of decadence and class snobbery in northern New Mexico, where they flourish today.

At heart, *mythopoesis* simply means the creation of a story, but in Mr. Work's usage it suggests the formation of a canon. There are a few cracks in the argument—is Luther Standing Bear, for example, to be reckoned as a writer in the same way as John Muir and Stephen Crane? Such questions go unanswered in the interests of cultural inclusiveness, and the editor might have taken a bit more time to explain why it is that one should read (as indeed anyone with an interest in Western writing should) the work of Isabella Bird and Sharlot Hall, the latter being Arizona's first territorial historian (as well as, although Mr. Work does not address the issue, one of the West's most vocal and virulent racists).

Mr. Work continues his canon-building theme with his third section, "The Neomythic Period (1890-1914)," offering such writers as Wallace Stegner (who properly belongs next to Edward Abbey, figuring here in the closing section, "The Neowestern Period," as one of the West's great iconoclasts), the late A.B. Guthrie, Wright Morris, Mari Sandoz, Frank Waters, and John Steinbeck, each of whom contributed to the development of a truly Western literature. In terms of literary quality, this is the best section of the book. Among its many pleasant surprises is the inclusion of Dorothy Johnson's superb short story "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance," a masterwork of compression that is today known mostly through John Ford's film adaptation.

Mr. Work closes with selections from Ann Zwinger, whose scientific precision and literary skills place her in the forefront of contemporary nature writing; Gary Snyder, the one-time beat poet whose work now stands at the center of American literary environmentalism; N. Scott Momaday and James Welch, who can be jointly credited with the flowering of Native American literature in the last three decades, and Rudolfo Anaya, who holds a similar place in Chicano writing. He also rightly includes work by the Laguna Pueblo poet and novelist Leslie Silko and a harrowing sequence of poems by Jimmy Santiago Baca, whose Albuquerque echoes Dante's hell. These two writers, like their older contemporaries, extend so-called ethnic literature into the universal.

The occasionally errant organization aside, *Prose & Poetry of the American West* is a highly useful collection. The editor has taken pains to select works of high quality, as many previous anthologists have not. This critical stance necessarily pushes aside the generic "Western," the Colt revolver of literature, mass-produced and made of interchangeable parts. Mr. Work's intelligent headnotes add substantially to the value of the collection, which, despite its high price, will be of interest to a wide audience.

Gregory McNamee, a regular contributor to Chronicles, *is now editing a literary anthology on the natural environment of Arizona.*

BRIEF MENTIONS

LEFTISM REVISITED: FROM DE SADE AND MARX TO HITLER AND POL POT
by Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn
With a Preface by William F. Buckley, Jr.
Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway; 520 pp., $29.95

About sixteen years ago, when the first edition of the present volume was published, the *nouveaux philosophes* were attracting attention in France, on the rest of the Continent, and in the United States with their discovery of what they called "socialism with a human face." Since that time, they have been eclipsed totally by a series of historical events that Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, the Austrian writer and scholar, would be the first to warn us against celebrating prematurely. The face of socialism is no more human than it ever was—or can be.

Kuehnelt-Leddihn believes leftism in all its manifestations (communism, socialism, nationalism, national socialism, and democratism) arises from maladjustments of the spirit, perversities of the heart, and weakness of the intellect, either singly or together. In his view, nearly everything bad in human history has come from leftist tendencies, and nothing good can be set to their credit. *Leftism Revisited* traces this history of leftist heresy from the Greek democracies to (as promised) the Cambodia of Pol Pot, a depressing history that Kuehnelt-Leddihn furbishes with stimulating illustrative accounts of leftist inhumanities, brutalities, and atrocities, such as the Parisian mob's display of the Princess de Lamballe's private parts on the end of a pike, the frying alive of a kitchenmaid at the Tuileries after she had been rolled in butter, and the burial, up to the chin, of a Benedictine monk by the Vietcong, who left it to the ants to finish the job.

In preparing the new edition of his book, Kuehnelt-Leddihn has made a particular point of contrasting American with Continental "conservative-Rightists." As a High Church Catholic and a self-described "liberal of the far Right," he foresees that many of his opinions are likely to offend certain American readers, as for example that "Democracy is the concept of the totally politicized nation; it is a populism, like ethnicism (nationalism) or racism, and therefore leftist—and consequently totalitarian." Among the "false but clear" ideas that the left has succeeded in imposing on the modern world are "nationalism and democracy, two forms of collectivist horizontalism" that Kuehnelt-Leddihn thinks must be replaced if we are to find our way out of the postmodernist predicament.

When Kuehnelt-Leddihn writes that "in a way, and unrealized by most, the democratic age is over—even for the United States," he is in substantial agreement with the Hungarian-born American historian John Lukacs, whose *Outgrowing Democracy* is a book-length treatment of this idea. While I take their argument seriously, neither Kuehnelt-Leddihn nor Lukacs seems to recognize how the federal principle, properly regained, might be made to compensate—even yet!—for the failure of the democratic principle in America. But it would have to be pretty damn quick.

—*Chilton Williamson, Jr.*

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Letter From Academia

by Murray N. Rothbard

Life Lessons

◆

Academics have no more human frailties, I suppose, than are rampant in any other occupation. But those frailties are far more repellent, and far funnier, in a profession ostensibly dedicated to the disinterested search for truth.

1. *The pettiness of the stage.*

Backstabbing and politicking in the Executive Suite to obtain a million-dollar post as head of a corporation has a certain grandeur, or at least it sets the stakes high enough to make the poltroonery understandable. But how about similar knifing and backstabbing to get a five-hundred dollar "merit" increase in salary? Or a thousand-dollar research grant?

2. *The meeting.*

There is nothing on this earth as boring, as stupefying, as a typical departmental or faculty meeting. The intensity of discussion and debate is inversely proportional to the importance of the topic, and since academic meetings almost always dwell on trivial issues, the boredom is intense. Often professors use these trivial occasions to inflict "self-expression" upon their colleagues—with extensive soundings off on their philosophy of teaching, their views on the meaning of life, and on and on. Once, at the importuning of colleagues, I was elected to the seemingly august and all-powerful Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate. At last: a peek into the corridors of power! I found that the committee met diligently for several hours each week, at which the chairman would lovingly read a chapter from the by-laws (treated with the reverence due the Bible, but scarcely as poetic or instructive). We were engaged in a multi-year process of suggested revision of this set of meaningless gabble, after which the administration would solemnly take this nonsense under advisement. Needless to say, I quit after one meeting.

3. *Busywork.*

I once taught at an institution where the only, and I mean only, concern of the administration was do-re-mi. Instead of professors being monetarily rewarded according to merit, their "merit" consisted entirely of bringing research funds into the university, preferably grants that used the labs so that the university could get a rake-off for so-called "overhead." Social scientists or historians, who didn't use labs, were therefore necessarily at the low end of the totem pole. One year, our social science department was cursed with a determinedly gung-ho chairman who had a bizarre view of faculty grants. Since it was implicitly recognized that there was precious little chance of *getting* any, he focused on writing grant proposals—"Hooray! Jim has written four grant proposals this term!" Applause. This was a demented version of the Marxian labor theory of value.

The president of this installation, by the way, was a native of Europe, and on his summer trips abroad, he would find that I had a considerable reputation in his native country. (A prophet honored everywhere but at home?) Did this make him think better of me, and give me more "merit points" in his eyes? Quite the contrary. He became increasingly mad: if I was such a big shot, why wasn't I bringing money into the school? Sort of: if you're so smart, why aren't you making me rich?

4. *The unacknowledged class struggle: the nonpublishing Old Guard vs. the young hotshots.*

This class conflict has been going on for the over forty years that I have been in academia. My first job was at a prestigious business-oriented college at which the tenured Old Guard all had Ph.D.'s all right, but none of them in economics. One professor had a Ph.D. in industrial engineering, another in German literature, another in philosophy, and so on. How did they wind up in economics? Who knows? But they did, and their ignorance of the field was cosmic. Naturally, they had published nothing on economics, as well as nothing, so far as I could make out, on any other subject. The only professors who knew anything about economics were the few younger ones, who predictably went on to publish and make a mark in the profession. The tension between the two groups was profound. University administrators (except for the benighted case I've mentioned) generally like to build up the prestige of the university and therefore the scholarly reputation of the professors. The professors themselves, however, are ambivalent; while enjoying the "externalities" of the prestige of colleagues, how do they (the Old Guard) look, and what happens to their own "merit" (invariably gauged in relative terms, since only a limited amount of merit funds are available)?

One favorite memory is of the edifying sight of the Old Guardsmen sitting around with their canned multiple-choice questions to the elementary courses they were teaching, trying to puzzle out the answers a bit before their students were to be subjected to the tests. The chairman said, "We'll have to teach them something about this guy Ky-ness" (Keynes).

5. *The New Left Episode.*

Since many conservative academics seem to have been permanently traumatized by the New Left revolution on campus, I should say that I found the experience far more amusing than traumatizing. During that period, I was hired by a largely Marxist (and at the same time highly productive) social science department, which functioned as a left-wing island in a fairly conservative sea of engineers. Why was I hired? Three reasons: (1) I, like them, was strongly opposed to the war in Vietnam, and we had mutual friends such as the historian William Appleman Williams and his disciples; (2) I could be used as an ultra right-wing offset to the charge of the department being commie (Absurd! We've got

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Rothbard in our department!); and (3) I had long had ties with a right-wing foundation, and they were expecting me to bring them some right-wing money (the do-re-mi factor again). Little did they know that it was precisely because my ties with right-wing foundations had been abruptly severed that I was trying to get back into academia.

The New Left revolution was pretty mild on our campus; the only left-wing students were the handful of social science majors. The peak was an ugly incident about an attempt to blow up the ROTC building, and there were some anti-Vietnam War resolutions passed by the faculty, but the big fight was over a Student Power attempt to add two student representatives to the sainted Curriculum Committee. The university then had on its faculty one of the leading Ayn Rand academics, who, sounding very much like a character in Alison Lurie's *The War Between the Tates*, got up and made an impassioned speech to the effect that having any student reps on the Curriculum Committee would spell the end of Western Civilization, a surrender to the barbarians at the gates, and all the rest. The outcome was very different. When the student reps finally gained the inner sanctum of this mighty committee, and they saw for themselves the bog of boredom and triviality in which the committee was mired, they quickly and quite sensibly disappeared, never to exercise their "empowerment" again.

The department itself was a little more troublesome. The New Leftists among the Marxists insisted, for a brief span, that we teachers should not inflict content on the students, that we should only "rap about their feelings," etc. This did not get very far, since the chairman was a cantankerous old-fashioned Marxist concerned about good cigars and fine wines, who would no more get down and dirty with hippie students to rap about their feelings than he would join the SS. One of my colleagues was the nation's outstanding Trotskyite economist (for what that's worth), and he was highly touted by his acolytes in the department as the "finest mind of our time." Unfortunately, the Finest Mind was already in the process of being blown by hallucinogenic drugs, followed rapidly by faux-Buddhism or Hinduism. This fellow astonished the distinguished Marxist Isaac Deutscher at a socialist scholars' conference. Expecting to meet a brilliant American Trotskyite, poor Deutscher was confronted by LSD and Hindu gibberish; this might well have contributed to Deutscher's death shortly thereafter. The Trotskyite-Hindu shared an office with a female pro-Cuban revolutionary, and the smell of incense emerging from that office was matched by side-by-side posters of Ché with a rifle and the multi-armed Hindu goddess. To the sobs of the department, the brilliant young Trotskyite-Hindu didn't get tenure, not having published anything; in later years he left academia to become an itinerant Velikovskyite.

The female revolutionary was an interesting case. Coming to the department as a graduate student in political science, she flounced into her interview in a micro-mini (those were the glorious first days of the mini revolution), leggy, gorgeous, and flirtatious. For some reason, the males in the department suddenly developed an intense interest in their department's hiring practices. I'm afraid that some of their scholarly acumen was lost in the process. Suffice it to say that six months or so after she was hired, she was swept up in the feminist revolution. Gone for all time were the miniskirts and the flirtatious and suggestive behavior, to be replaced by grim and bitter attacks on the evils of oppressive maledom. Not only was she an employee of the Cuban government; she announced, when her time for tenure was at hand, that she was not going to finish her Ph.D., publish in scholarly journals, or all the rest of that bourgeois claptrap. Yet the rest of the department indulgently recommended her for tenure, with the exception of myself, who calmly pointed out that since academia was inextricably linked with such alleged claptrap, she should, on her own terms, be happy to leave such an uncongenial institution. Neither she nor the rest of my beloved colleagues appreciated my position, but it turned out the university was not nearly as indulgent as the department, and the lady now flourishes as a Cuban employee outside the confines of the hated bourgeois world.

At any rate, New Left student activity on the campus collapsed with Mr. Nixon's brilliant masterstroke of repealing the draft. Suddenly all the young idealists lost their reason for protesting the war or much of anything else; and in our engineering university, why would anyone, not fearful of the draft, linger on as a social science major, for heaven's sake?

In conclusion, I would submit that much of the antics of academia is systematic and institutional; there is no reality check. Universities are nonprofit institutions, which means they are inefficient, for their main source of revenue is not their students, but donors, whether government, corporations, or besotted alumni. As a result, responsibility and accountability are weak if not nonexistent, and kooky/petty/dysfunctional behavior is given its head.

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Letter From England

by Christie Davies

The Collapse of British English

◆

The English language is in danger. It is being invaded and infiltrated by the vulgar slang, the horrid jargon, the grammatical errors and the nasal pronunciation of the United States. Such is the nightmare of those crumbling remnants of the British establishment who still prize the affected tones of what was once termed the Oxford accent, B.B.C. English, the public-schools' drawl. Today Oxford students tend to sound like the provincial chemists they are, the B.B.C. weather forecasts are given out by an entertaining Irishman from County Antrim, and even England's expensive elite boarding schools are more concerned with examination results than with ensuring that their pupils acquire porcelain vowels and effortlessly slurred consonants. Even the younger members of the British royal family have modified their speech away from

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the exclusive, hierarchical manner of the old English upper classes. Queen Elizabeth II is the last British monarch to speak like the Queen of England to her subjects. Charles, Prince of Wales has already implicitly indicated that when he succeeds to the throne he will speak as King of the British people.

All these changes are part of the slow social revolution that has transformed Britain during the last fifty years and leveled the former pinnacles of the English aristocracy, if not to a broad flat democratic American plain, at least to a manageable hummocky rubble of boulders and moraines. It is doubtful whether the Americans were in any way responsible for this process. Rather, the British have to thank Marshall Goering's World War II Luftwaffe, which forced people of all classes to cower together in common air raid shelters, and the postwar provision of free false teeth under socialized medicine that for the first time enabled the English lower classes to express themselves clearly.

The formerly toothless poor could now insist on being listened to and demotic speech became increasingly acceptable. The Americans are not to blame, but those English people who are nostalgic for their old ways of speaking find America a convenient scapegoat because it is rich, powerful, and an endless source of appallingly bad television programs.

The English spoken by the majority of urban, white Americans is far more homogeneous than is the case in Britain itself, and differs very little from standard British English. The average middle-class English traveler has far less trouble communicating with his counterparts in Chicago, San Francisco, or H.L. Mencken's Baltimore than with his fellow citizens from Glasgow, Liverpool, or Newcastle, and a cultured English visitor to the wilder parts of Yorkshire is still advised to take an interpreter with him. By contrast the differences between the standard forms of American and British English are trivial and so well-known that they form the basis of aged jokes that circulate on both sides of the Atlantic. In one such jocular tale an English visitor to an American office, either naïvely or cunningly, depending on who is telling the joke, asks a typist if she has a "rubber," a word that in England signifies an eraser, but in America refers to what the French term a *capote Anglaise* and the English call a French letter.

Such differences are no more than jokes, for the interchange of preachers and professors, of books and lecturers, of words and wordmongers across the Atlantic is both frequent and easy. As a speaker and writer of Welsh English, my main worry when writing for American publishers is that I do not understand the American system of punctuation, but then I do not understand the British system either. I was absent from school on the day that they did punctuation. American intellectuals, far from being either coarse or jargon-ridden, tend rather to be shocked by the Rabelaisian freedom of utterance of their English female colleagues and by the fog of meaningless verbiage that fills the speech of England's Francophile intelligentsia, who even now continue to ponder the obscurities of Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Althusser, and Poulantsas. Like their wives, they always appear dressed in last year's French fashions. It is only the Americans who have resisted such nonsense, albeit mainly because they know no French. Americans alone remain the true heirs and guardians of the English tradition of blunt, clear, down-to-earth empiricism.

The one place where a major difference between the two cultures may be seen is the television screen. Sad to say, British television is 70 percent rubbish but then, for me at least, American television is at least 95 percent rubbish. I have often sat in American motel rooms before a television set with ten different channels and no choice. Americans, by contrast, are amazed at the relatively high quality of British television. It is, though, a false comparison. Europeans tend to see the very worst of American television, which is often dumped in European markets below cost after it has made its main profit in America. American television stations, however, on the rare occasions they buy abroad, will only buy high quality British television programs, particularly if they also have a strong historical dimension. As a people without a history, Americans have to buy it where they can. Until very recently American broadcasting companies have been unwilling to purchase British television soap operas, even though they are sufficiently banal to appeal to the Australians and the Bavarians. The other side of this prejudice is that the British ridicule any film in which an actor with an American accent is cast as a noted European such as Napoleon or Mozart. The Britishers see history, even Corsican or Austrian history, as their own cultural monopoly. In consequence American popular culture is made to look even more crass than it really is, while the Europeans, and especially the British, deceive the Americans into paying deference to a cultural superiority that is in large measure bluff.

The current British concern about the state of the language is misplaced, for Britain's real problems lie in the slow collapse of its system of high-school education, where standards have already dropped sharply and are likely to slump even more. Britain's schools are in decline not because the Britishers have imitated the equivalent great American disaster but because of the power wielded by Britain's *own* ignorant and envious left-wing egalitarians. Similarly, the problem the British will face in the future when innumerable satellite television stations beam abominations into the very heart of their homes will be the fault not of the Americans but of advertisers who are only willing to sponsor programs aimed at viewers with a mental age of less than ten. It is high time that the British ceased to see their American cousins as the villains responsible for undermining the house of intellect and came to see them as what they are: fellow victims of the equality-mongers.

Christie Davies is chairman of the sociology department at the University of Reading.

LIBERAL ARTS

CULTURAL AMNESIA

A man who does not know what happened before his birth will remain always a child.

—*Cicero*

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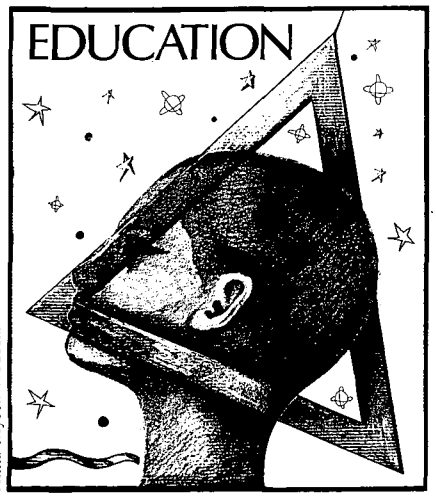

Anna Mycek-Wodecki

Mason v. Mason

by Matthew Hoffman

The 'Dress a Sig' Controversy at George Mason University

The members of George Mason University's Sigma Chi fraternity had little reason to believe their annual "Dress a Sig" fundraising event was politically incorrect. To those present last April 4, the proceedings seemed innocuous if a bit raucous. Participating sororities paraded members of Sigma Chi in women's clothing across a stage, eliciting hoots and applause from the boisterous crowd of Greeks. Among the contestants was a "Sig" whose corresponding sorority had dressed him in blackface and strapped a pillow to his backside. After the men strutted their stuff, the audience voted for the "ugliest girl" in the bunch. The event helped to raise over one thousand dollars for the Cleo Wallace Center, a home for abused children.

It is doubtful that Sigma Chi or the cooperating sororities had racist or sexist intentions. With its 25 percent minority membership, Sigma Chi is one of the most integrated fraternities on campus. One of its members, Archibald Kao, of Oriental descent, is serving as the president of George Mason's student government. Gamma Phi Beta sorority, which dressed the fraternity member in blackface, has minority members in several leadership positions.

The Greeks could not have known they were inviting the wrath of George Mason University. The event had been approved by university officials, and the "Dress a Sig" contest of the previous year had been conducted on university grounds without controversy, as had a "lip-sync" contest in which white participants dressed in blackface.

The participants in "Dress a Sig" were therefore surprised when, two weeks later, enraged letters written by various university officials and addressed "to the campus community" appeared in university buildings, denouncing the event as "hurtful," "offensive," and "insensitive." One letter demanded that Sigma Chi respond by showing "a willingness of the membership to participate in programs involving intercultural and gender issues." This was required, the letter threatened, "to substantiate their claim that Sigma Chi and the Greek system at GMU are important contributors to the positive development of campus life." Dean of Student Services Kenneth Bumgarner informed the participants that the incident would be investigated by the university.

Meanwhile, leaders of various student groups that claimed offense at the event had organized a closed forum, moderated by administration officials, to discuss the issue. At the "suggestion" of Dean Bumgarner, Sigma Chi and Gamma Phi Beta agreed to participate and sent several representatives. The frightened Greeks, aware of the possibility of serious punishment, were not allowed to speak; they sat quietly while their fellow students excoriated them. The offended parties spoke interminably of their suffering and demanded reparations from the Greeks. The facts were discountenanced; only emotions were deemed legitimate topics of discussion. At one point, John Singsank, the president of Sigma Chi, was ordered to stand and face two minority members of his fraternity. "How do you think you've made them feel?" he was asked angrily.

By the end of the forum, the sorority representatives were in tears, confessing their guilt as they held hands for mutual support. One of the sisters, herself of Arab descent, babbled almost hysterically. "I'm so sorry," she sobbed. "I'm so guilty!"

The Sigma Chi representatives, Archibald Kao among them, apologized repeatedly and profusely in a frenzy of self-deprecation, calling themselves "stupid" and "ignorant." Russell Hopler, co-president of the Student Coalition Against Racism and one of the organizers of the forum, was so shocked by the way the Greeks were intimidated and humiliated that he recanted his involvement.

The written apologies of the offending groups, blown up and posted by the university for all to see, were equally submissive and apologetic. "There is no excuse for our insensitivity and lack of forethought. We will never be able to apologize enough for our behavior," wrote the president of Gamma Phi Beta sorority. Sigma Chi strove to sound politically corrected. "We now see the insensitivity of our actions and have a new perspective on cultural issues," wrote Singsank.

Two days later, Dean Bumgarner's "extensive examination" culminated in a decision. No formal hearing had been conducted, and Bumgarner admitted to the *Washington Post* that no written rules had been violated. Nevertheless, he wrote in yet another posted letter, "steps must be taken to ensure that there is no repetition of this repugnant conduct." Sigma Chi was placed on probation for two years, during which time they are forbidden to conduct any activities, on or off campus. The Gamma Phi Beta sorority was placed on probation for one year. "Our constitutional rights have been completely thrown out here," said Singsank. "The university has taken away our freedom of speech and our right to due process. We were never charged with anything."

Exceptions were made for the initiation of new members, and events "with

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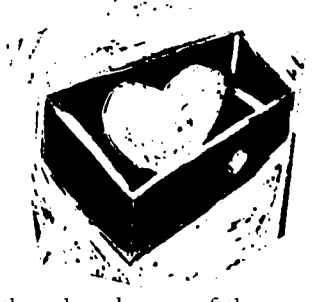
an educational purpose directly related to gender discrimination and cultural diversity." Sigma Chi and Gamma Phi Beta were ordered to "plan and implement an educational program addressing cultural differences, diversity, and the concerns of women." In a surprisingly explicit phrase, Bumgarner revealed that "The exceptions to the ban on fraternity events reflect a premise that these events will create a desirable attitude among the participants and will, in effect, be building a future cadre of students to assist in promoting positive attitudes towards these issues."

Finally, Bumgarner warned the punished Greeks not to defend themselves. "The membership is cautioned to avoid any response or action that could be viewed as antagonistic or detrimental to the offended parties," he wrote.

University student organizations hastily issued a plethora of resolutions and statements in support of the administration. *The Broadside*, George Mason's student newspaper, published an editorial praising Bumgarner's decision as "carefully considered and reasonable." The student government senate issued a statement condemning "all events and activities that intentionally or unintentionally offend or hurt any members of this university"—apparently unaware that they were denouncing all controversial speech. Even the Interfraternity Council, a body of fraternity representatives, denounced Sigma Chi's actions and imposed its own, less draconian sanctions on the fraternity.



Although only one of the sororities was punished, all of the sorority members who had participated in the event were told that their actions were sexist—even if they were not aware of it. They were ordered by Bumgarner to develop programs to "address issues related to . . . gender discrimination and stereotyping." The sorority women, wrote *The Broadside*, "have chosen to acquiesce in the tradition of sexism so ingrained in our society (including the Greek system)." Said the director of the Women's Research and Resource Center, Karen Rosenblum: "The sororities, whether consciously or not, had recreated and participated in sexism."

Sadly, a campus that had been relatively free of racial tension became a veritable tinderbox. "Before this incident I never judged a person by the color of his skin, but now it does go through my mind," said one bitter sorority member, who added that many of her friends feel the same way. Instead of promoting harmony among Mason students, the politics of "multiculturalism" have created division and strife. Yet since the disciplining of Sigma Chi the administration has only gone further with its "multiculturalist" crackdown.

When students applied to perform an act in which they would imitate the black singer Aretha Franklin (without blackface) during a "lip-sync" contest at the university's annual Mason Day celebration, they were denied permission by a university official. "He told me that the act would be considered racist and sexist because six white men were performing it," said John Kirchhoffer, one of the applicants. Another group that applied simply to dress as women while dancing to the ZZ Top song "Legs" was forbidden to do so, and finally had to perform in towels. (Only a day after the canceled Mason Day events, the university's celebrated Center for the Arts presented a ballet, "Trochadero de Monte Carlo," in which men dressed as women and parodied ballet classics. The university charged up to twenty dollars per seat.)

Apparently the university police are now being used to apprehend thought-criminals. In its latest posted letter as of this writing (June), the university complained of "Racist, Homophobic, and Derogatory Flyers" posted in bathrooms, and requested that informers who "have any information about who may have distributed these flyers, please contact the nearest campus police officer."

The rise of "multiculturalism" at George Mason University was a surprise to many who viewed the university as a safe haven for conservatives. A rapidly growing Virginia university located close to Washington, D.C., Mason has made a name for itself by attracting prominent conservative intellectuals to its faculty. Few outward signs of the coming changes preceded the administration's new policy, though there were some: two years earlier, the university had established a formal "cultural diversity" program, which included sparsely attended seminars teaching, among other things, the evils of "abelism" (prejudice against the disabled) and "heterosexism." The university's guide for interviewing applicants for Residence Advisor positions has generated controversy in recent months with its "Tips on Interviewing Black Candidates." In the realm of expression, however, the university had remained quiescent.

Many students cynically attributed the policy changes to the university's desire to appease Virginia Governor Douglas Wilder, who has sought to reform the state campuses according to his own liberal formula. In the 1990-92 budget, George Mason suffered significant losses. Classes had been canceled, tuition rates had increased, and even some parking lot lighting had been disconnected. One student senator who had voted to support the administration admitted to me that his motivation had been to attract more state funding to the university. He claimed other senators had voted for the same reason. Indeed, Wilder congratulated the university for its response to "Dress a Sig" during his commencement address to graduating Mason students. "Mockery, exclusion, or intimidation of any kind are antithetical to intellectual enlightenment," he said.

George Mason University, however, has yet to hear the last of the "Dress a Sig" controversy. As I write, Sigma Chi is preparing to file a lawsuit against the university on First Amendment grounds. In the end it may be George Mason himself, through the Bill of Rights he drafted over two hundred years ago, who protects the liberty of students from the university that bears his name. One may wonder if he would have found humor in this irony.

Matthew Hoffman, a junior at George Mason, has written for the Baltimore Sun, *the* Orange County Register, *and the* Washington Times.

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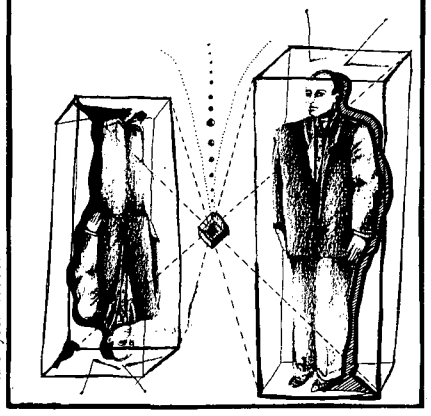

Anna Mycek-Wodecki

The Way It Was?

by Lorrin Anderson

The Ethics of Docudrama

"The nation must be grateful that millions of Americans . . . are being taught night after night lessons that may help them live more amicably with their fellow citizens."

That's Walter Goodman, writing in the *New York Times*. "Goaded by minority groups," he says, "commercial television has become a leader in the movement to get Americans to accept other Americans . . . the biggest successes in the continuing push-and-shove have been won by minority groups bent on converting negative images into positive images."

Walter Goodman, as it happens, is a perceptive and generally fair-minded TV critic, and he's not the kind of guy to delude himself, or us: "The point, pardon the word, is propaganda—mild, benign, not force-fed by the state, but propaganda all the same." But he's not complaining either: "That is as it must be."

Must it?

How grateful should we be that we are being force-fed by an entertainment establishment that keeps shoveling out the agitprop? That the aim is ostensibly benign—tolerance, brotherhood—doesn't put the question to rest.

The Goodman quotes are actually from a piece he wrote a couple of years ago. But they apply *a fortiori* today, when every other sitcom and fictional drama carries a social message, usually stacking the deck in favor of the latest elitist fashions in right thinking.

Where race is involved, nobody in his right mind can object to attempts to put positive images of blacks on television. Even casting gambits that defy current social probabilities—like making most street criminals white and most (non-corrupt) judges black or female or both—are perhaps more or less harmless. But intellectual dishonesty is dangerous at best, and it gets to be a particularly sticky business when the vehicle is that unholy amalgam of purported journalism and sensationalized entertainment, the docudrama.

When a movie purports to be essentially factual, and superimposes a crawl at the end telling us what ultimately happened to the principals in real life—well, given a skillfully doctored script and the powerful, visual impact of television, millions of people probably think that's the way it was, the way it really happened. And when that *wasn't* the way it was, in centrally important ways—when we're getting a distorted picture of American history or social reality, or both—the result is likely to be not benign but pernicious; the well-meaning attempt to promote racial harmony may well end up exacerbating animosities, fueling white resentment, and feeding black paranoia.

Attacks on the docudrama—from both left and right—are hardly new. But it just keeps rolling along. Case in point: a made-for-TV movie that appeared earlier this year, on NBC: *If Looks Could Kill: The Marla Hanson Story*.

The crime the movie is based on was a shocker even for New York: MODEL SLASHED! The razor-wielding thugs who cut Marla Hanson up in the summer of 1986 weren't trying to kill her. They just wanted to destroy her face. They didn't quite succeed; the long red gashes they left were not, thanks to extensive plastic surgery, ultimately disfiguring. But the scars will always be there, and the attack ended a promising career before the cameras.

Cut to February 1991: Marla Hanson, the Movie. A story with the customary departures from reality—dramatic license—and with an increasingly familiar bonus, a sort of cultural affirmative action that holds up a distorting mirror to the racial complexities of American society.

Marla was—is—a Missouri girl who had come to the Big Apple to carve out a career, and she was starting to get some breaks. The crime was instigated by a white man named Steve Roth, who had sublet an apartment to Marla and two other young women and who, in a twisted way, wanted to be more than a landlord—Marla's lover, in fact; that's the way the movie portrayed it, anyway. (It didn't mention that Roth had a homosexual relationship with at least one of the two black friends he hired to carry out the razor attack.) The ostensible reason for the assault was money: Marla, fed up with Roth, wanted to move out, and she wanted her security deposit back. Roth reluctantly agreed, but instead of giving her the money he set her up for the slashing. (Roth and his two friends were all convicted and went to jail, though they'll soon be eligible for parole.)

The most striking thing about the case, aside from the bizarre nature of the crime, was the way Marla Hanson was twice victimized, first by Roth and the slashers and then by the lawyer for the two black defendants. And the man who mounted the second assault—an unbelievably brutal courtroom attack on Marla as witness—was Alton Maddox, the bitterly antiwhite agent provocateur who has since been barred from practicing law because of his role in the Tawana Brawley hoax. Under the tolerant eye of Judge Jeffrey Atlas (you have to be careful about reining in militant black lawyers if you don't want to be called a racist), Maddox announced that it was his circus now, that he was the ringmaster who was going to "get that lyin' bitch." He went on to administer a verbal battering, painting Marla as a slut and trying unsuccessfully to get her to say the word "c---" on the stand (to describe herself). It is difficult to believe that a white lawyer, especially in these days of feminist concern, could have gotten away with anything like it.

While the crime involved an attack on a white woman by two blacks, nobody, including the press and Marla herself, assigned any particular significance, at first, to the racial element. (Imagine, if you can, the racial uproar

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if two white thugs had slashed the face of a black model.) The question of race, however, was brought to the fore by Maddox himself: he constructed a preposterous scenario involving a supposed conspiracy between Marla and the police, and portrayed the victim as a racist who had fingered his two clients only because they were black.

So what do we see in the movie? Well, the courtroom assault on Marla is there, in a watered-down version—the sarcastic hectoring, the blunt suggestion of sluttishness. In the interest of verisimilitude, apparently, the lawyer who batters Marla on the stand even wears the kind of glasses favored by Alton Maddox. *But he's a white man.* The lawyer character's persona is repulsive, and his behavior is just about (though not fully) as disgusting as Maddox's was at the real trial. *But he has been magically transformed.* And there's not so much as a mention of the racial red herring Maddox dragged into the trial.

The affirmative action doesn't stop there. Two cops, at first unaware of the crime, happened to catch the assailants because they were behaving suspiciously—running from the scene with razors in their hands and blood on their clothes. The cops were in reality white; in the movie, one of them, the good guy who is cast as the interrogator of the suspects, has become black. And the tough but sympathetic prosecutor who shepherds Marla through her ordeal is now a black woman; in real life she was a light-skinned Hispanic (who, reportedly, was privately upset that Hispanics hadn't gotten *their* due in the movie). But those adjustments are minor compared to the transmogrification of Alton Maddox.

Coincidentally, NBC's local anchorman in New York, Chuck Scarborough, had been involved personally, as a reporter, in covering the Marla Hanson case, and after the movie aired on February 4 we were treated to an unusual spectacle on the 11 o'clock news: instead of the usual practice, in which the news shows shamelessly plug movies and series broadcast on their own networks, we got a news spot, by Scarborough, which in a low-key but devastating way compared the facts of the case with the contorted movie version, noting particularly the conversion of Alton Maddox from nasty black bully to nasty white bully. A salutary coda, though hardly an antidote to the preceding two hours.

That same distorting mirror, in an equally mendacious variation, was deployed a year earlier in a TV movie about another notorious New York crime, the fatal black-white incident in Howard Beach, Queens. (This movie was also aired on NBC, but that's probably a coincidence—NBC is no more prone to this sort of thing than the other networks.)

The facts of the Howard Beach case, in capsule summary, are these: after a couple of confrontations between white teenagers and three blacks from outside the neighborhood, the whites, several dozen of them having gathered by now, ended up chasing the blacks, catching and beating one of them while another, high on cocaine, ran into traffic on a busy highway, where he was struck and killed by a speeding car. The movie was called *Making the Case for Murder* and that's technically accurate, since it reverently chronicles the efforts of special prosecutor Joe Hynes to get murder convictions. But even the title is inflammatory and misleading: it is highly unlikely that the young whites intended to chase the black victim onto the highway, or to kill him in any other way, or that all of the defendants even knew until later that he had run to his death. In any case, the most serious crime anybody was convicted of was second-degree manslaughter.

While race was unavoidably one aspect of Howard Beach, contemporary society being what it is, the black-white confrontation arguably had more to do with turf than with race—the kind of episode that would have gotten little public attention if the people involved had been either all white or all black. The press and television, however, have persisted in calling the incident both "racial" and a "murder"; Joseph Fried of the *Times* used the phrase as recently as May of this year, and Fried in particular ought to know better—at least that no one was convicted of murder—since he covered the trial. Or maybe it was an overzealous copy editor who put in the "racial murder," lest we forget.

How do you lie in a docudrama? Besides the obvious techniques available to print as well—ranging from selective use of information to manipulation of tone—the visual dramatic medium, especially when it combines fact, fiction, and conjecture, offers a cornucopia of inviting possibilities. Casting and direction and the shading of performance alone create an impact that can easily overwhelm even an honest script. You can lie pictorially, without using any words at all. And if you're doing a docudrama you can pick and choose your facts and emphasis—and stir in your own fictions—to drive home just about any point of view you want to peddle. This philosophy, which, of course, applies to non-TV movies as well, was neatly summed up recently by Irwin Winkler, who directed *Guilty by Suspicion*, this year's misleading treatment of the blacklisting of the 1950's: his film is fiction, Winkler told reviewer Ronald Radosh, but fiction that he hopes "blends a certain amount of reality to make the fiction more truthful to the audience." (Radosh's dissection of *Guilty by Suspicion* was written for the *New York Times* but published in the *American Spectator* after the *Times* decided instead to run a piece by Victor Navasky, editor of the *Nation*.)

In the Howard Beach movie, which presents itself as fact, not fiction, the lies started with the casting: the three blacks, who were all, in reality, physically imposing men, turned up on the screen as somewhat smaller, and as very appealing guys, despite some hostility that was implicitly and explicitly explained away in the usual terms of poverty, racism, etc. The movie generally fudged their unsavory past histories (all three had criminal records), and their own not-so-innocent role in triggering the ultimate violence. (Who started the exchange of racial epithets that took place, for instance, has never really been established.)

The white teenagers, on the other hand, were portrayed as sneering, smirking little bigots (that indispensable pejorative), and the movie made no reference at all to the fact that the most prominent defendant, seventeen-year-old Jon Lester, actually had a number of black friends (including a former girlfriend) who think, and have no hesitation in saying, that he was railroaded for essentially political reasons in a poisonous public atmosphere inflamed by sensational, and often inac-

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curate, press coverage. Lester is serving a prison term of ten to thirty years.

Alton Maddox also figured in the Howard Beach case, as a lawyer for the black man who was beaten, Cedric Sandiford, and Maddox's refusal to cooperate with prosecutors greatly complicated efforts to get at the truth and resolve some still nagging questions about what really happened. In the movie, Maddox and an equally implacable colleague, C. Vernon Mason, are merged into a composite called Clayton Barry, whose hostility and obstructionism are made to seem both understandable and entirely justified, given the way blacks are victimized by the criminal justice system. There is no mention at all of their friend Al Sharpton, whose numerous provocative marches into Howard Beach had a lot to do with stirring up racial hostilities.

The movie got generally respectful press reviews. Wendy Lin, who covered the story for *Newsday*, found it "basically faithful" but "surprisingly dispassionate," and actually faulted it for "taking pains not to inflame." A somewhat puzzling complaint, in view of the way the movie portrayed the white defendants as junior Klansmen who deserved murder convictions whether the racially mixed jury felt that way or not.

If the movie desensationalized anything, it was the provocative and sometimes violent behavior of black militants and their white radical allies as they staged demonstrations both against the white defendants and against "racism" in general. White supporters of the defendants were sometimes openly hostile, and some Howard Beach residents rose to the bait as Al Sharpton and his troops marched through the streets, but the "balance" displayed in the movie was essentially false. One scene shows a white shoving a black outside the courthouse; that probably never happened. We don't see something that really did happen—the arrest of a black man for punching a white witness.

And if anybody had any doubts that the moviemakers' hearts were in the right place, there is the sequence involving a black man named Charlie Brasher, most sympathetically played by Gregory Alan-Williams, who has been wrongly convicted of rape. Idealistic prosecutor Joe Hynes, heroically portrayed by Daniel J. Travanti, had been Brasher's unsuccessful defense lawyer, and his guilty feelings about losing that case have undermined his confidence to the point that he's scared to take on the Howard Beach job. So Charlie, in a moving jailhouse scene, has to talk him into it. A nice dramatic touch, with the added message (it doesn't have to be stated) that blacks accused of a crime don't get a fair shake. In reality, the defendant in the sex-crime case on which the sequence is remotely based was white, an accused child-molester who was eventually cleared and who had nothing at all to do with inspiring Hynes to meet the Howard Beach challenge.

The American dilemma has proved to be far more complicated and intractable than most people dreamed in the heyday of the civil rights movement. At the same time, we've come a long way in the past thirty years, if not in rescuing a large residual underclass, then at least in reforming prevailing popular attitudes about tolerance, justice, and equality before the law. The exaggerated focus on putative white hate, in short, traduces an America that is trying like hell—albeit counterproductively, often enough—to live up to its ideals. And in a way these overheated sermons are too pessimistic—turning Jon Lester, for instance, into a mean little hater, when by almost all accounts he was a nice kid with black friends who paid an inordinate price for his role in the affair. By painting a complicated tragedy like Howard Beach as a latter-day lynching, which it emphatically was not—despite incendiary comments at the time by politicians, including Mayor Ed Koch—the movie seriously distorts not only the case itself but present social reality. That doesn't make reasoned dialogue any easier.

And who can recall a television drama that even touched on black racism—not hostility, which can be a different thing, but racism? How patronizing to blacks it is, really, to trot out the old double standard every time there's a choice to be made.

Whatever his psychological problems, however understandably they may be rooted in America's historical guilt, Alton Maddox is a destructive person. He's not a very good lawyer, but he has a real talent for his specialty: throwing racial monkey wrenches into an already beleaguered criminal justice system. He is a man, in short, who has carved out a career whose "most consistent themes have been hidden agendas, self-promotion, and hatred of all law enforcement."

That appraisal is from Jack Newfield, writing in the *Village Voice* in January 1987, a couple of weeks after the Howard Beach "racial murder." Newfield goes on to quote Murray Kempton, another columnist not known to tolerate white racist rhetoric, as suggesting that "Maddox's hidden agenda here [in the Howard Beach case] may not be public justice at all, but deeper racial bitterness among blacks, and a negligence suit against the city that might produce money for all concerned." Jack Newfield was the "creative consultant" for the Howard Beach movie, though not, apparently, creative enough to persuade the producers to put in an accurate portrait of Maddox or anything else.

As for the Marla Hanson movie, if the people behind that endeavor had taken on Maddox's disturbing role in the case, honestly and straightforwardly—well, that would have taken *real* courage. And it would not only have been better journalism but better art, if it's not too outlandish to use either of those honorable words in connection with such a debased genre.

Or how about a TV movie based on Tawana Brawley's lurid, lying tale of rape and degradation at the hands of white brutes, and the way Maddox, Mason, and Sharpton stirred the racial pot in that sleazy affair? (In the Brawley case, Sharpton outdid himself by comparing New York Attorney General Robert Abrams to Hitler and accusing Abrams of masturbating over a photo of Tawana; others said Tawana's purported ordeal was the kind of thing that typically happens to black women in present-day America, so it didn't matter if she was lying or not.)

The Tales of Tawana—a hell of a story. What we get instead—and of course it's not only on television—are movies like *Mississippi Burning*.

English director Alan Parker begins that story with the 1964 murder of the civil rights workers Schwerner, Goodman, and Chaney (who are not specifi-

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cally identified). But the plot revolves around a highly fictionalized attempt by two FBI men, winningly played by Gene Hackman and Willem Dafoe, to find the bodies and bring the killers to justice. There's a disclaimer at the tail end of the closing credits: "This film was inspired by actual events which took place in the South during the 1960's. The characters, however, are fictitious and do not depict real people, either living or dead." Which not only reduces the possibility of lawsuits but allows Parker to serve up a heady mixture of fact, gripping violence, and imaginary episodes, like a made-up threatened castration, in the service not only of Mammon but morality. Only the most conscientious moviegoer is likely to have stayed in his seat long enough to see the disclaimer, and the film itself has already ended with a documentary-style montage of names, convictions, and sentences; since a lot of people don't read reviews, one might presume that many of those who saw it thought it was a faithful recreation of the case, and a genuine slice of Mississippi life.

In tune with received opinion as it was, *Mississippi Burning* nevertheless generated considerable controversy when it was released late in 1988. But the main criticism came from people who thought Parker and his writer, Chris Gerolmo, hadn't been politically correct *enough*—that while they were self-consciously on the side of the angels as far as racial justice was concerned, they shamelessly glorified the FBI and didn't pay enough attention to the black heroes, sung and unsung, of the 1960's civil rights battles in the South.

That may in fact be true. But the blacks in *Mississippi Burning*—and there are numerous black characters—are depicted with great sympathy, as courageous people with a quiet dignity that is emphatically denied to white Mississippians, almost all of whom, in 1964, seem to have been either homicidal Ku Klux Klansmen or their acquiescent fellow travelers.

There are two sympathetic Southern white characters: the Mississippi-bred but reconstructed redneck played by Hackman—the FBI agent Anderson—and an equally fictitious Mrs. Pell, the troubled wife of one of the guilty Klansmen. Anderson eventually sweet-talks Mrs. Pell into spilling the beans about the bodies (the actual informant is believed to have been a Klansman bribed by the FBI), and Mrs. Pell pays dearly: her husband beats her mercilessly as his friends in the Klan goad him on. But later, on the mend, she gets to give a speech to Anderson about what it's like to grow up in Mississippi. Mrs. Pell also says that she's staying in town because "there's enough good people around here know what I did was right." That takes about four seconds of a two-hour film in which we haven't seen any of those good people, only maniacal Klansmen of unsurpassed villainy, corrupt local lawmen and politicians, and dumb stereotype yahoos spouting white supremacist dogma.

Oddly enough, one of the complaints about the movie, from a black former civil rights worker named James McPherson, suggests that some ordinary humanity might have existed even in the heart of darkness. There's a sequence in the movie where Klansmen attack a black church; a young boy drops to his knees in fearful prayer, and one of the Klansmen comes up, gives him a savage kick in the head, curses him, kicks him again, in the stomach, and leaves him prostrate and writhing. In fact, according to McPherson, the character of the boy is based on a woman named Beatrice Cole, who, about to be beaten by the Klan, asked if she could kneel and pray. "The Lord was there," he quotes Mrs. Cole as saying later, "because then the man said 'Let her alone' and he looked kind of sick about it." McPherson concludes that "this Klansman, behind his mask, apparently had a slight moral sense."

McPherson was not, of course, doing p.r. for the Klan; his essay, on the op-ed page of the *New York Times*, was making a different point—that by focusing on the violence of "the relatively few poor Anglo-Saxons in the Klan," the movie camouflaged the depths of (continuing) racism among whites in general. That's a hard thesis to defend, given the way *Mississippi Burning* trashed (Southern) whites in general. But whether or not McPherson has a point, his account of the Klansman and the praying black woman does suggest a rule of thumb for this kind of moviemaking: that is, take all the barbarity you can find in the record, and if it's not barbarous enough to drive home your point—well, doctor it up until it is.

It's interesting to compare a feverish broadside like *Mississippi Burning* with an earlier work that doesn't pretend to be factual: *To Kill a Mockingbird* (the book and also the movie, which was a generally faithful adaptation). Harper Lee's 1960 novel, also set in Mississippi, but in the 1930's, was another passionate indictment of racial injustice: a decent black man—admirable in fact—falsely accused of rape by a young white woman, convicted by an all-white jury that has to know he's innocent but doesn't have the courage or moral fiber to go against the code. And the episode ends with the desperate black man shot to death while trying to escape. Not a story to let anybody off the hook, and the specific racial issues it addressed were still very much to the point when it appeared in 1960. But in its clear-eyed humanism—with many decent white as well as black characters—this work of honest fiction presents a far more convincing version of the segregated South than the "based-on-fact" movie does, a portrait of a tragically flawed but by no means monstrous society coming face to face with the moral imperative for change.

How far the arts have come since then. Honesty on matters of race—an approach that actually explored today's complexities and ambiguities—would of course mean giving the Zeitgeist a sharp kick in the shins. Far easier—and far safer—to give us tracts like *Mississippi Burning*, to go on dredging up bitter, violent memories of a bygone America, obsessively and tendentiously picking away at yesterday's scabs, making sure that old, half-healed wounds are kept open and bleeding.

Art and journalism both go whoring off in dubious directions all the time, and always have, but they both still manage, occasionally, to fall back on their birthright: to speak the truth. Too bad that the pious pretenders of popular entertainment think they have a franchise to barter that birthright away for a pot of message.

Lorrin Anderson is a former editor and producer for WNBC-TV News in New York.

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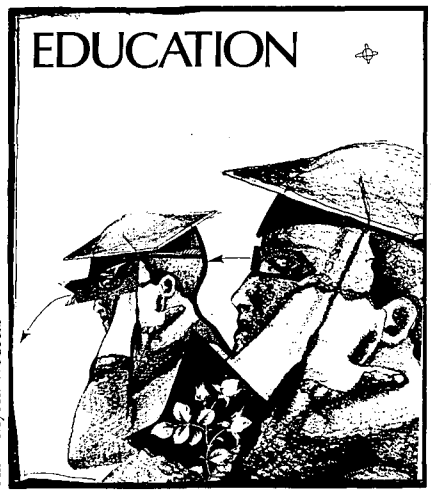

Anna Mycek-Wodecki

The Weight of Bricks

by Janet Scott Barlow

Are we all going crazy? A few months ago, I read a newspaper column containing information so shocking yet unsurprising, so awful yet predictable, that I was overcome by emotional vertigo. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, I thought of John and Lawrence, two children I knew long ago, and disorientation was replaced by generalized depression. The lesson of John and Lawrence is that the past indeed is prologue.

From 1965 through 1969, in the years between getting married and becoming a mother, I worked as a teacher's assistant in the preschool/daycare center of a private, well-funded family services agency, one that employed an array of highly credentialed teachers, social workers, and psychologists. The agency was in an integrated urban neighborhood, next to a large university, and on the edge of a ghetto, which meant that the school drew children of all races and nearly every ethnic and socioeconomic background. There were children of university professors, of firemen, of welfare mothers. There were children of full-time college students who were also part-time hippies. There were Arab and Israeli children who got into fistfights during the Six-Day War. There were Haitian and Greek children who started school knowing not a word of English (and learned the language with breathtaking speed).

For me, a young woman with an affinity for children but no experience with them, no systematic knowledge of them, and no preconceptions about them, the four years I spent in that preschool would be a disorganized crash course in the ways of kids, a time when I learned many things rapidly, through a reverse version of cause and effect. That is, my learning was inefficient but indelible. It was as if I had been ushered into a laboratory filled with bricks and invited to explore the law of gravity. Inevitably, I wound up dropping bricks on my foot. The trouble with experiential knowledge is that, for a while anyway, you learn more about the weight of bricks than about the principles of gravity. Of course, the beauty of experiential knowledge is that when some physicist comes at you all theoretical and technical, you can say, "Hey, have you ever dropped a brick on your foot?" As a form of insight, the lowly object lesson has an inescapable purity.

I also discovered a few things about adults in that environment, but in that instance, sequential knowledge was not a factor. My most important discovery — it was news to me at the time — was that adults as a group have an infinite capacity for rationalizing and justifying, in the name of children's welfare, all kinds of self-serving adult behavior that is contrary to children's welfare. And that's where John comes in.

The late 60's were the period of the black power movement, and there was much talk among the agency staff about how to "deal with" the issue of black power with the children, how to "communicate" the concept and "support" it. It is a strange experience to be, as I was then, 21 years old and professionally inexperienced, and to encounter experts in the field of child development whose thinking takes the form of urgent debates about how best to teach street politics to a group of preschoolers, some having serious emotional problems completely unrelated to race, class, or ethnicity. It is so strange an experience, in fact, that it can color for life one's feelings about experts.

The black power discussions, like everything else during those years, went on and on, month after month. And one day in the midst of all that, John, a child whose charm was the product of perfectly combined intelligence and innocence, showed me a picture he had drawn. The picture was a collection of random shapes, all of them colored black, that were arranged on the page to look like they'd been shot from a cannon. When I asked him about the drawing, John, who was black, said, "It's a picture of black power." As I was studying the picture, John lifted his hand from behind his back and covered the first drawing with a second, this one of exploding orange-colored shapes. "That's orange power," he said. Another drawing, "Here's green power." Another. "Blue power."

When I related that episode at the next staff meeting, several teachers responded that John's drawing had exemplified his "confusion." And to minimize his "confusion," John was to be aided in being less "literal." It was almost funny: *Hey, isn't that a brick on your foot?* The plain fact was that John, four years old and by nature delightful, needed politicizing about as much as a day in springtime needs politicizing, and I had made another discovery about adults: they will fail at the business of helping children if they are unwilling to be made fools of by children.

Literalness, I would find, was to be encouraged or discouraged in children depending on what they were being literal about. Even more memorable than John is Lawrence, another "literal" child. But the difference between them was that John's literalness was organic to his age while Lawrence's was not.

After more than twenty years, I still remember every detail about Lawrence, including the color of his sneakers, the shape of his hairline, and the belt he cinched so tightly through the loops of his jeans that I wondered how he breathed. Lawrence was a child without resistance to physical impulses. When in doubt, which was always, Lawrence sought motion. He was fruitlessly confrontational, very intelligent, and extremely unhappy.

Among Lawrence's many burdens in life was the issue of religion. His parents, both college professors (that's no dig at college professors, but it seems somehow relevant), had told him from the time he could talk that there was no God and that religion was a "lie," an idea dreamed up by people unwilling to accept the finality of

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death. That was their right, of course, but they had taught unbelief to Lawrence not as an alternative kind of belief but as a cause, a battle against pervasive human stupidity. Lawrence was taught everything as a battle against pervasive human stupidity, and thus, his little belt squeezing his tiny middle, he was sent out to negotiate the terrifying and glorious territory of early childhood with nothing but the pathetic instruments of offended adult intellect.

Since he was a boy on a mission (that's all he had—his parents' missions), Lawrence discussed the nonexistence of God often and loudly, whereupon certain of his Baptist or Catholic or Jewish classmates would tell him, gravely and with frightening (to Lawrence) confidence, that he was in for sorrow if he kept that stuff up.

For parents who would take a scorched-earth approach to religion, secular myths are easy targets and quick work. So it was no surprise that as the holiday season rolled around, Lawrence told his classmates what his parents had told him: Santa Claus did not exist; he was an invention, a "lie," and the magic of Christmas morning wasn't magical at all because "your mom and dad do all that stuff."

Well. If it is possible, based on my experience, for five-year-olds to discuss the existence of God with a degree of tolerance and self-control, the same cannot be said of their discussions about the existence of Santa Claus. Except for the few who simply eyed Lawrence with concern and horror, as if he were dancing on the edge of a cliff, the Santaphiles in the group were all over him, and they were merciless—merciless enough to drag me, the grown-up, the teacher, the *law*, right into the middle of things. (It says something about either the power of religion or the mentality of children that while I was asked repeatedly to settle The Existence of Santa Claus, I never once was asked to settle The Existence of God.)

The Santa debate raged—raged!—all through Christmas, and finally a girl named Elizabeth decided to give Lawrence double trouble by combining a frontal assault with an end run. She told Lawrence that Santa Claus existed because she existed, that God had made them both, that the two of them, Elizabeth and Santa Claus, had come straight from the mind of God, and for that matter, so had Lawrence, and as for his mother who was supposedly out buying his Christmas presents, God had made her too. In one fell swoop, Elizabeth had made God responsible for everything Lawrence could see—like his mother, like Elizabeth—and everything he could not see, like Santa Claus, and the effect of her maneuver was to render Lawrence, for the first time since I'd known him, motionless. He was at that moment the most defenseless child I have ever seen.

But there was a valiance in Lawrence, and he wanted to rally. What he actually wanted, of course, was to be allowed to believe in Santa Claus (and, quite possibly, in God), but he was not going to be defeated just because he'd been denied. So finally, all twitching limbs and emotional nerve endings, full of the kind of urgency that can only be fueled by anxiety, Lawrence shouted that God had not made *him*, that he was the product of "an egg and a spern," that he had grown inside his mother and Santa Claus was nowhere on the scene, he was positive of that, because he could remember everything, all of it: it was great in there, inside his mother, and he had a little window for looking out on the world, and a stove on which he made his pancakes, and books, and a television set . . .

A pre-birth apartment. That's a cozy fantasy, one nearly any young child could come up with. But Lawrence was not any child. He was a boy forced into desperate fantasy because the entire world of things unseen had been denied him. And I thought: Oh, Lawrence, if only your parents at least had allowed you Santa Claus, maybe you wouldn't have to invent prenatal pancakes, and maybe I wouldn't have to be your classmates' trump card in a debate over prenatal appliances. For around me, 14 children—all but Lawrence—were screaming, "Mrs. Barlow! Lawrence says he watched TV inside his mother! Tell him he didn't! Tell him he *didn't*!"

Lawrence was cornered again. And because he already had paid so dearly for being deprived of so much, because he'd been given the hopeless task of assaulting, with inferior weapons, ideas he could never disprove, his eyes showed the fear he felt of being robbed yet again, this time of in-the-womb television, which was the only substitute for the comforts of God and the pleasures of Santa Claus that his beleaguered mind and stifled spirit could find.

It was with those memories of John and Lawrence that I reread the column that had caused my disorientation, the one I couldn't quite believe though I was sure it was true. Thomas Sowell was discussing the teaching of "death education" in public schools, even among first graders. Apparently there had been other reports on this "movement" but I had missed them. So I found myself reading for the first time, and then reading again, about six-year-olds who must "make their own coffins out of shoeboxes," and assignments requiring children "to decide which member of their own family must die, when the whole family cannot be saved."

It's as if educators had asked themselves, "Wonder how sadistic we can be?" and then succeeded in finding out. What could be crueler than an exercise in which children are required to mentally kill off a member of their own family? What but the creation of emotional chaos could be the purpose of group coffin-making? (There is emotional destructiveness even in the choice of materials: Children, you will now consider your own death. And you will consider this occurrence in the dimensions of . . . a shoebox.)

Some children cry during "death classes." That is, they suffer. Are their tears not a message, an object lesson, a brick on the foot of either their teachers or their parents? Not always, not often enough. Some things never change except to get worse, and yes, we're all going crazy. Twenty years ago, John's teachers were intent on eliminating his guileless literalness, and Lawrence's parents were determined to destroy any form of guileless nonliteralness. And today, six-year-olds are crying while making shoebox coffins (the perfect assault on guilelessness), and adults are still unwilling to be made fools of by children. What's new is that now adults are also unwilling to be shamed by children.

Janet Scott Barlow covers popular culture from Cincinnati.

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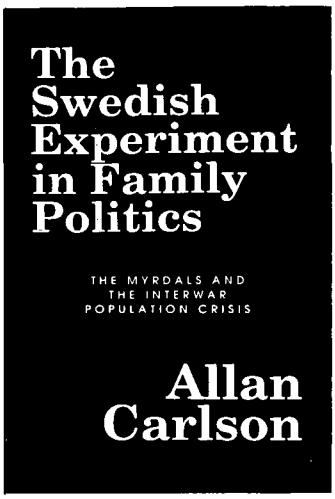

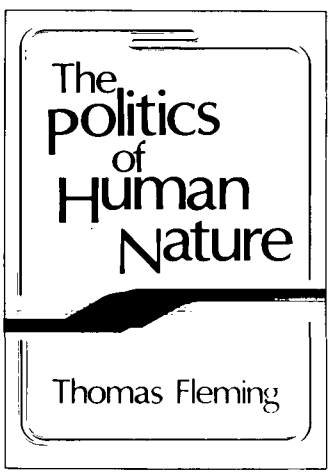

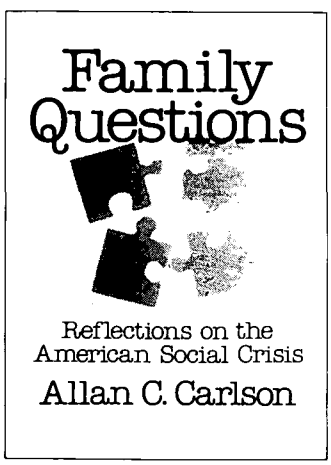

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